

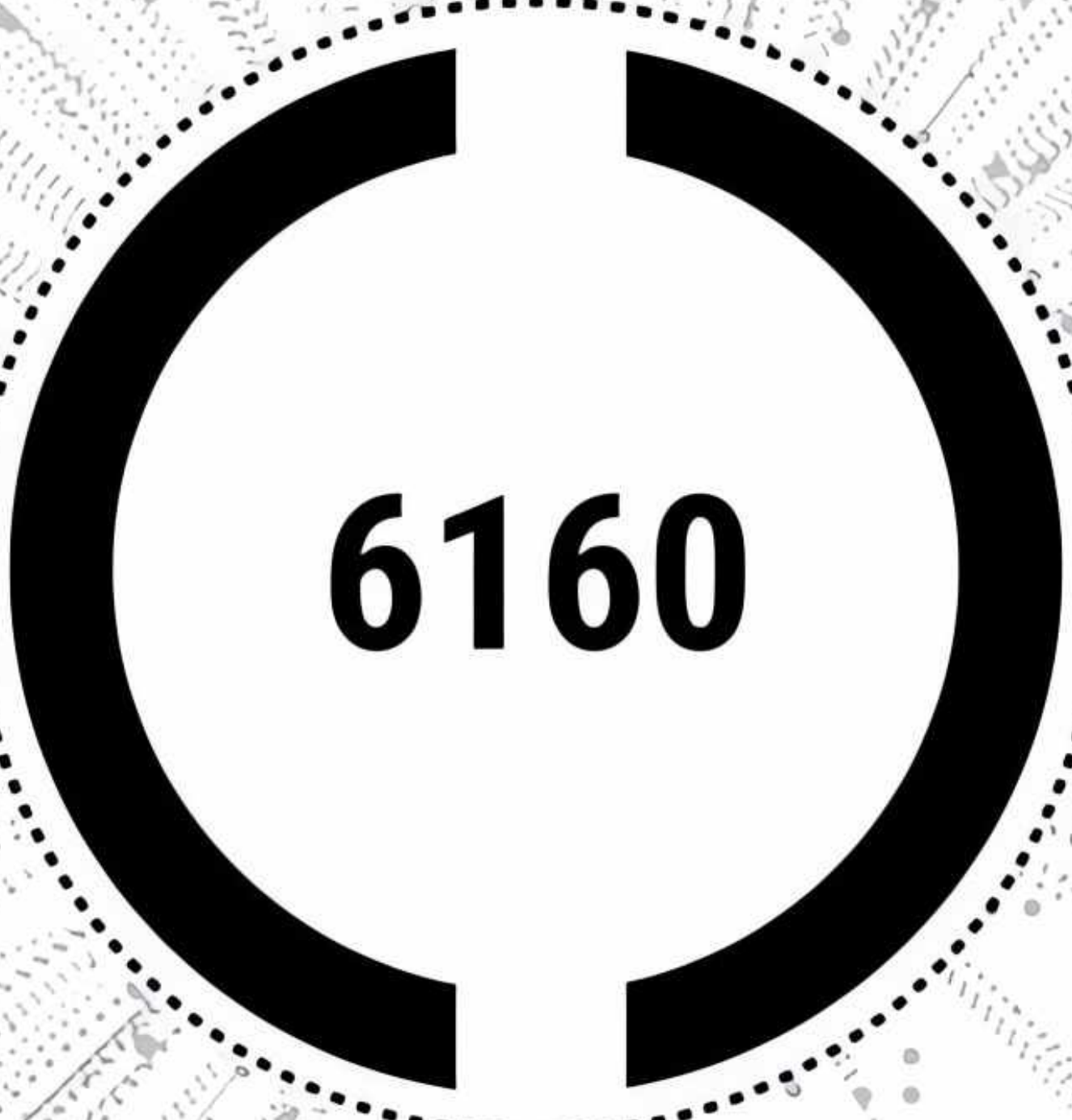
JONATHAN HICKMAN • BRYAN HITCH • ANDREW CURRIE • ALEX SINCLAIR

ULTIMATE INVASION



MARVEL

2



6160

CHAPTER TWO: “DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE”



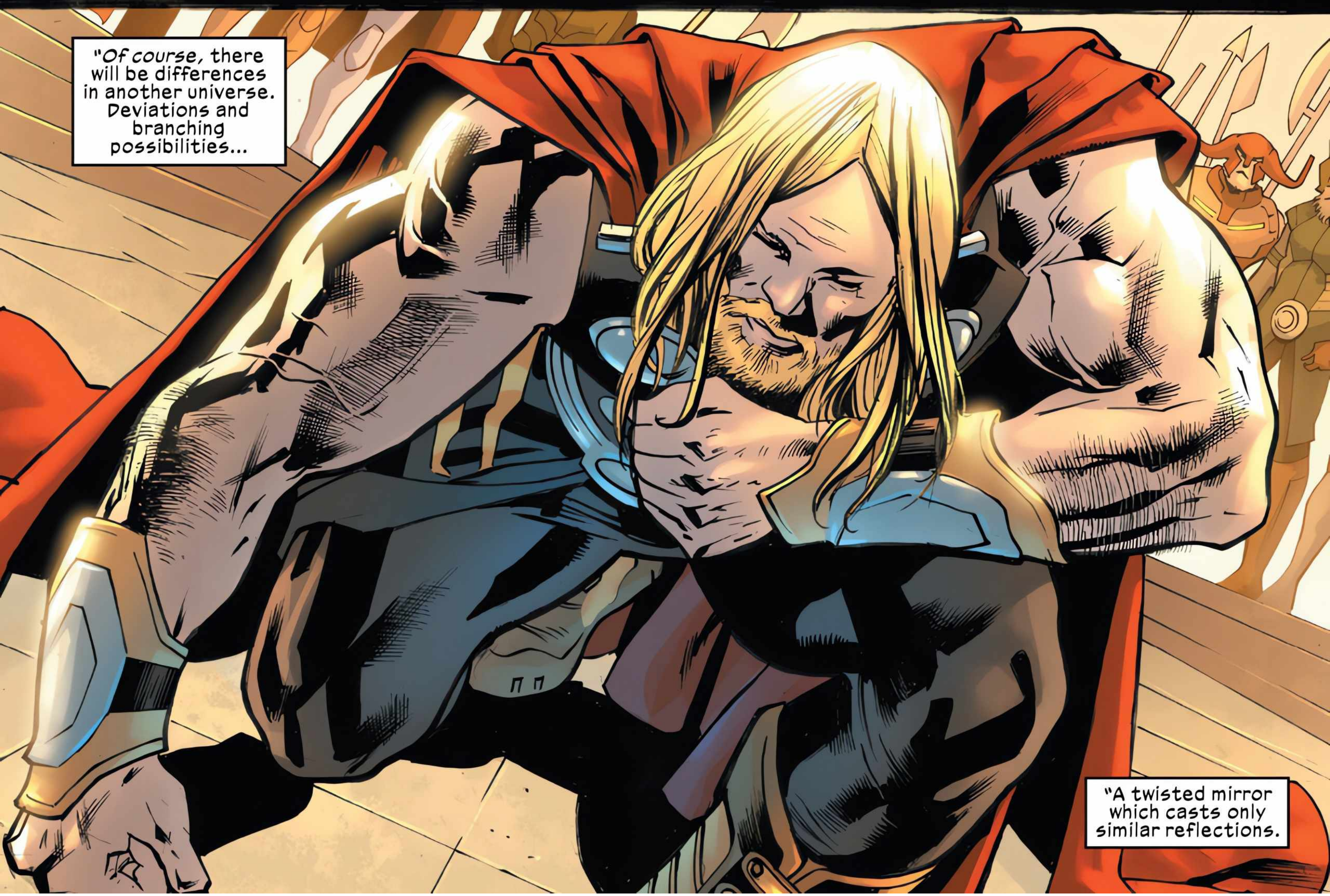
--if you had the *chance*...

Iron Man is depicted in a digital, teal-colored environment that resembles a computer database or a virtual interface. He is seated on a curved, metallic-looking platform, leaning back with his right hand on his head and his left hand resting on his thigh. His chest is glowing with a bright white light, and his helmeted head is tilted back. The background is a complex grid of teal lines and dots, with various labels and text elements scattered throughout. A speech bubble from Iron Man reads: "...would you erase me from existence?". The overall aesthetic is high-tech and digital, with a color palette dominated by teal, yellow, and white.



"And so, what exactly does one do with the full knowledge of their enemies--and the unlimited capacity to engage them--before they even have the faintest idea that you exist?"

"It's simple, really. Whatever one wants."



"Of course, there will be differences in another universe. Deviations and branching possibilities..."

"A twisted mirror which casts only similar reflections."



"Still, there is an Asgard."

"And with it, a son of lightning and thunder to deal with. A king of lies to place on a throne..."

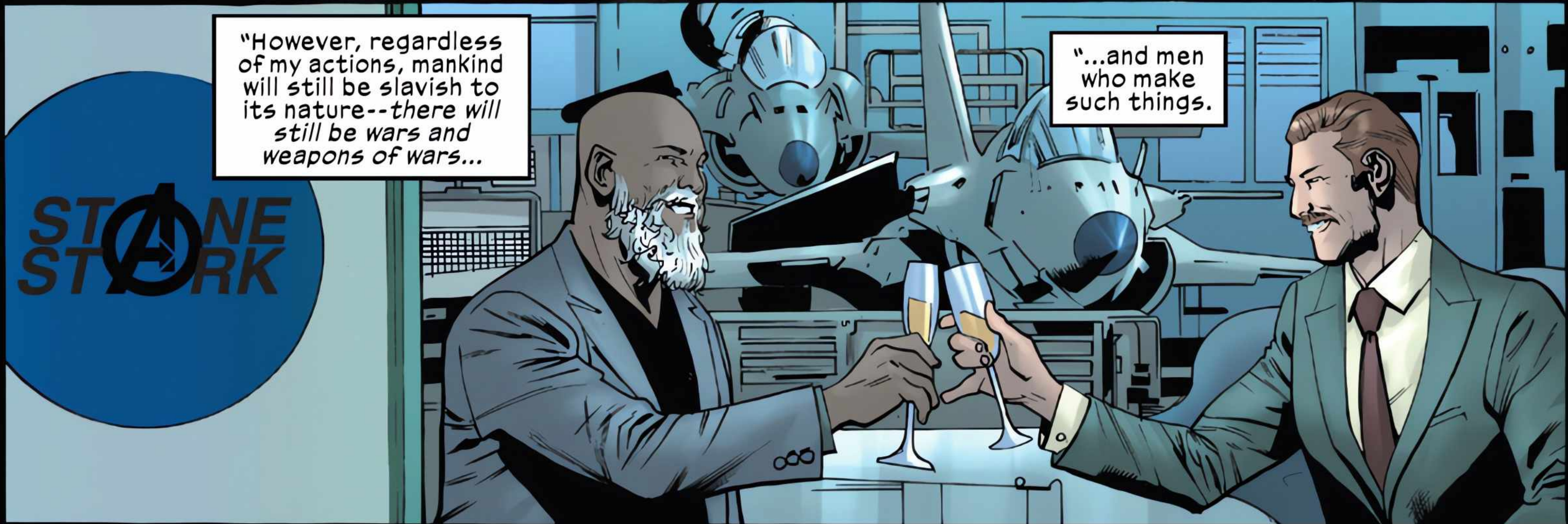


"A Bifrost to shatter."



"A rocket launch to delay by hours, and a cosmic storm missed."

"The fantastic reduced to something...more manageable."



"However, regardless of my actions, mankind will still be slavish to its nature--there will still be wars and weapons of wars..."

"...and men who make such things."

STONE STARK



"Bullets will
always be fired.
Bombs will always
explode..."

"There will be
fallout to manage,
and it will be. By one
monstrous means
or another."



"But there will also
be vacuums."

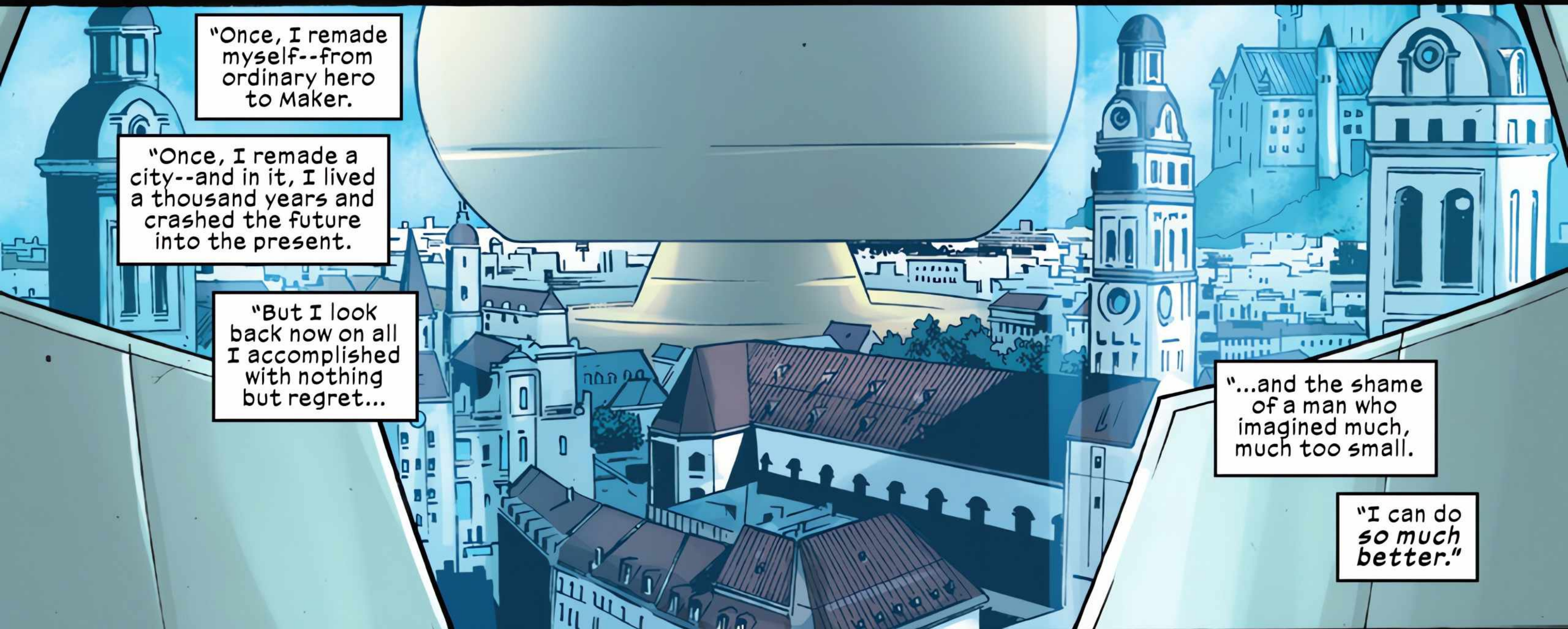
"Missing bits of
history that seem
impossible not to
be there."



"For example, I found no
man in the ice to murder.
It seems this world would
never have had a Super-
Soldier to lead them..."

"No paragon of a
better time full
of better men."

"It was fitting
to find a
world that
craves me."



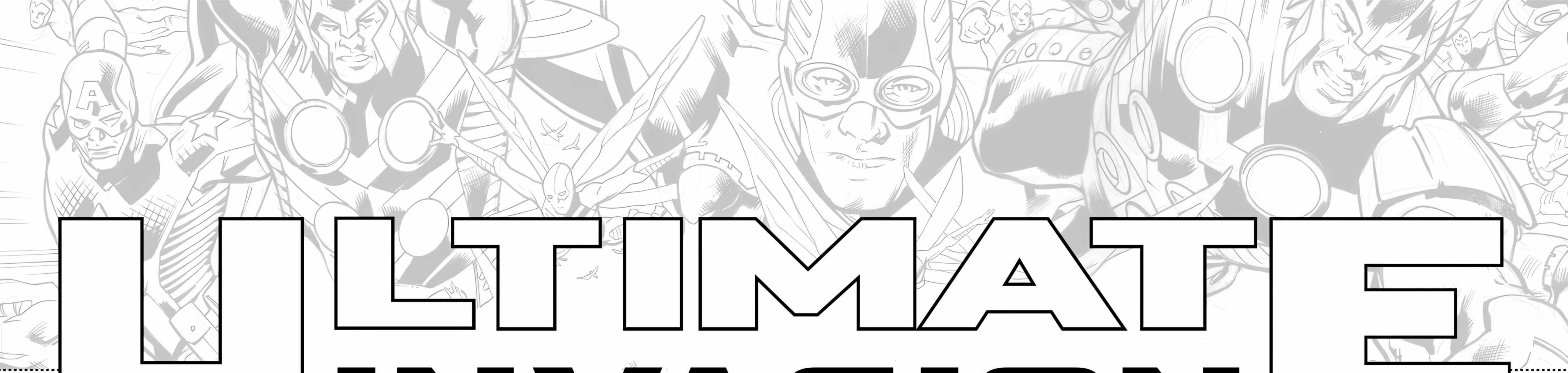
"Once, I remade
myself--from
ordinary hero
to Maker."

"Once, I remade a
city--and in it, I lived
a thousand years and
crashed the future
into the present."

"But I look
back now on all
I accomplished
with nothing
but regret..."

"...and the shame
of a man who
imagined much,
much too small."

"I can do
so much
better."



ULTIMATE

INVASION

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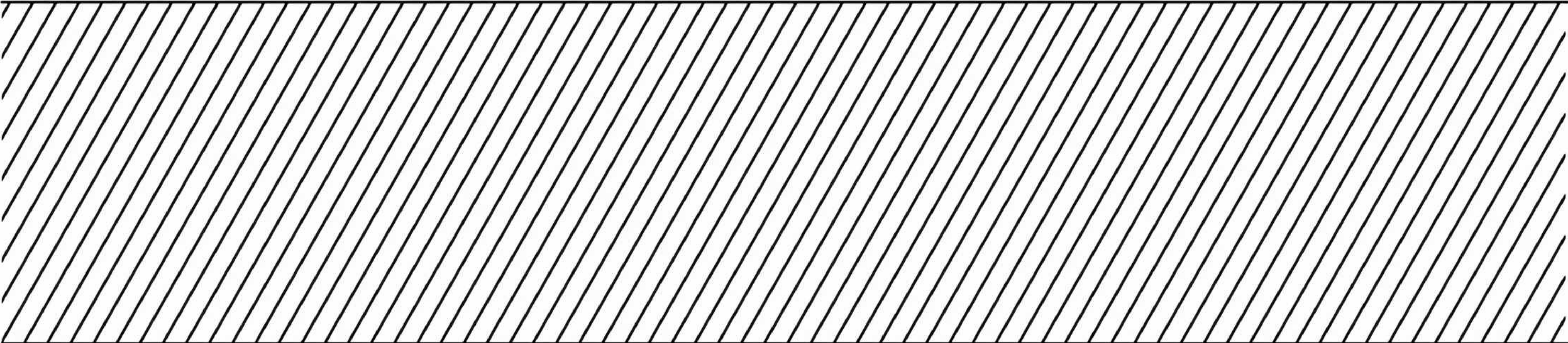
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MAKER MEMORY LOG

ARCHIVAL DATA [BR_616]

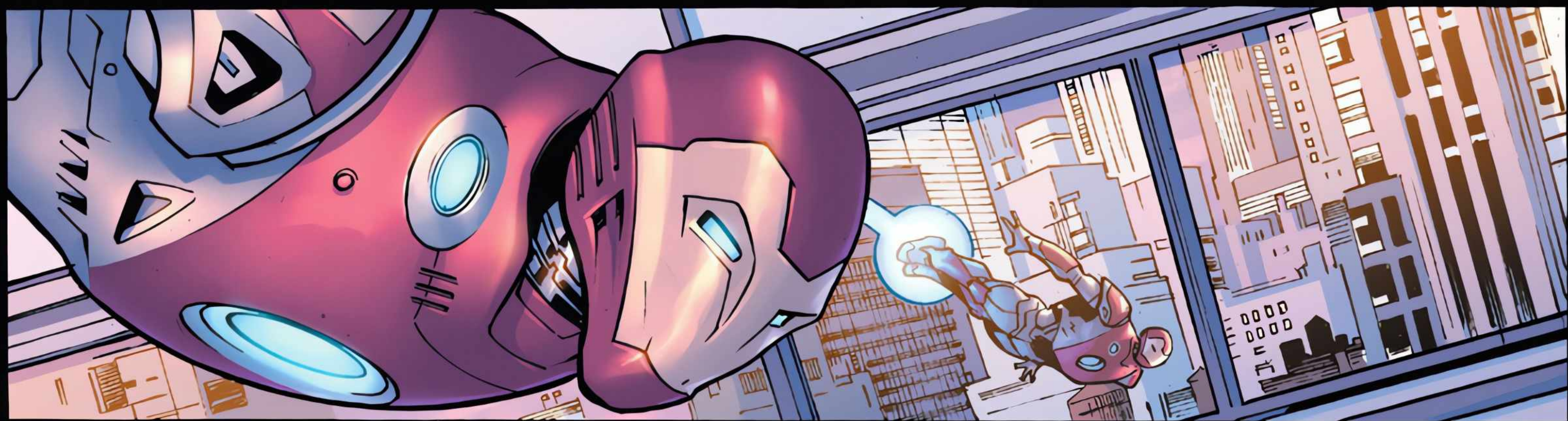
REVISED



WORLD EXPERIMENT: 6160

NAME	ORIGIN FILE	STATUS	NODE [REPOSITORY]	ARTIFACT
Jim Hammond	ZJYAU12	Deceased	12	Android Brain
Steven Rogers	IOD89GH	Undefined	--	--
James Buchanan Barnes	MWYJI21	Deceased	12	Blood Sample
Robert Grayson	BTW2900	Inactive	08	Quantum Bands
Jack Monroe	QOPKU03	Inactive	02	Blood Sample
Thor Odinson	OJTZA67	Captive	03	Destroyer Seed
Howard Stark	HYGTE1S_var	Controlled	07	Stane/Stark dBase
Reed Richards	LOSPE2A	Controlled	13-18	Dedicated Library
Susan Storm	LOSPE2B	Deceased	13	Blood Sample
Jonathan Lowell Storm	LOSPE2C	Deceased	13	Blood Sample
Benjamin Jacob Grimm	LOSPE2D	Deceased	13	Blood Sample
Henry Jonathan Pym	YJNS719	Inactive	06	Pym Generator
Robert Bruce Banner	UBB128B	Controlled	04	Blood Sample
Peter Benjamin Parker	LLOM223	Inactive	04	Biological Catalyst
Janet Van Dyne	PPLU17X	Inactive	01	Pym Generator
Stephen Vincent Strange	90128BQ	Captive	09	Eye of Agamotto

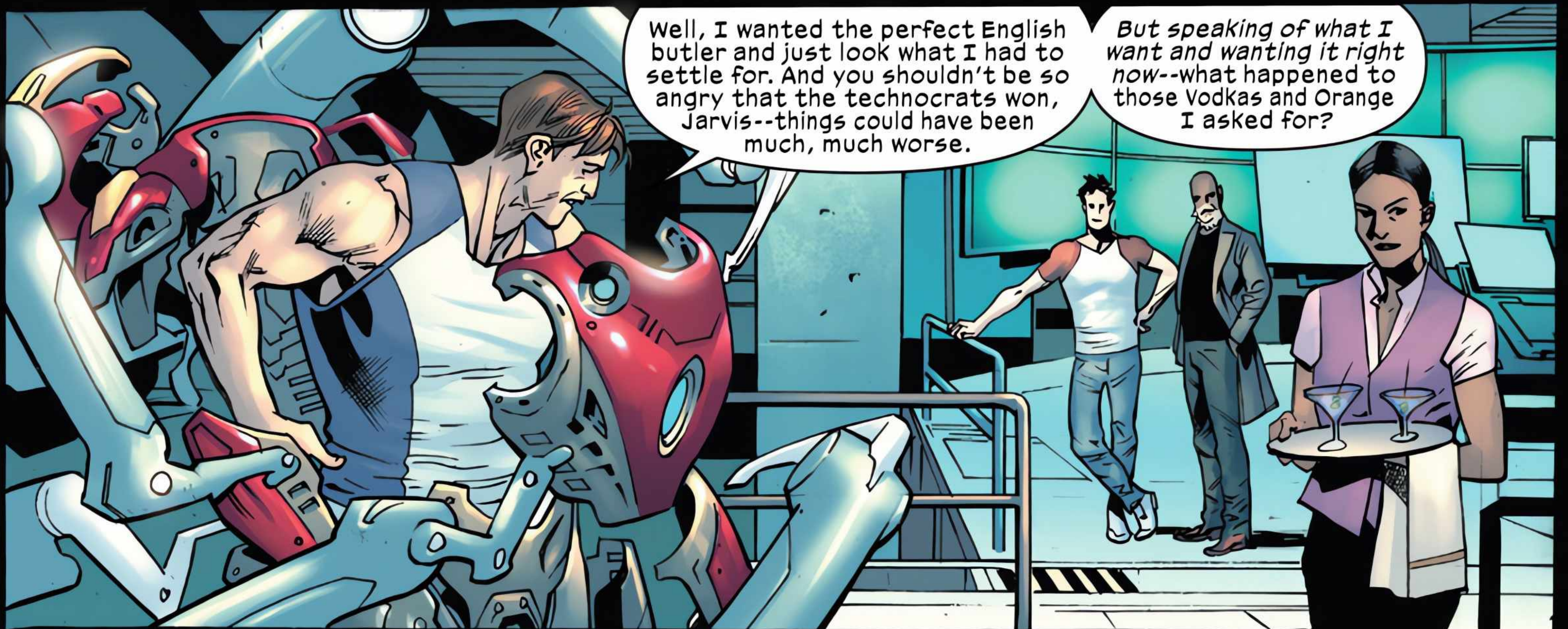
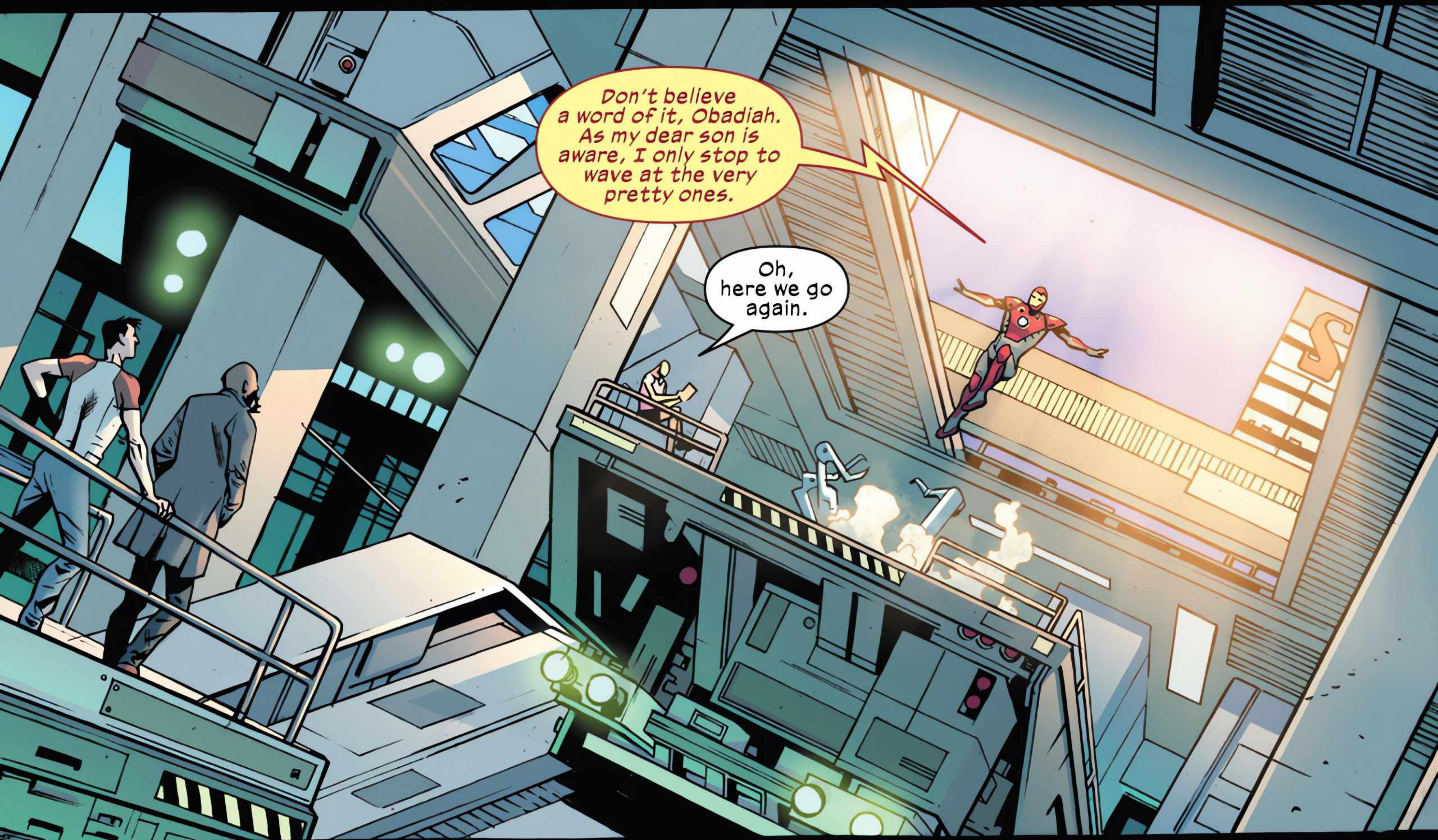
Manhattan.



Is this something new?
Or does he always show off like this when he takes the new suit out for a spin?

Every single time, Mister Stane. Sometimes I don't think Dad considers a test run complete until he's waved at every lady in upper-middle management in the city.







So. At the risk of--*once again*--being lectured to by my lifelong friend and trusted business partner, are you sure I have to do this?

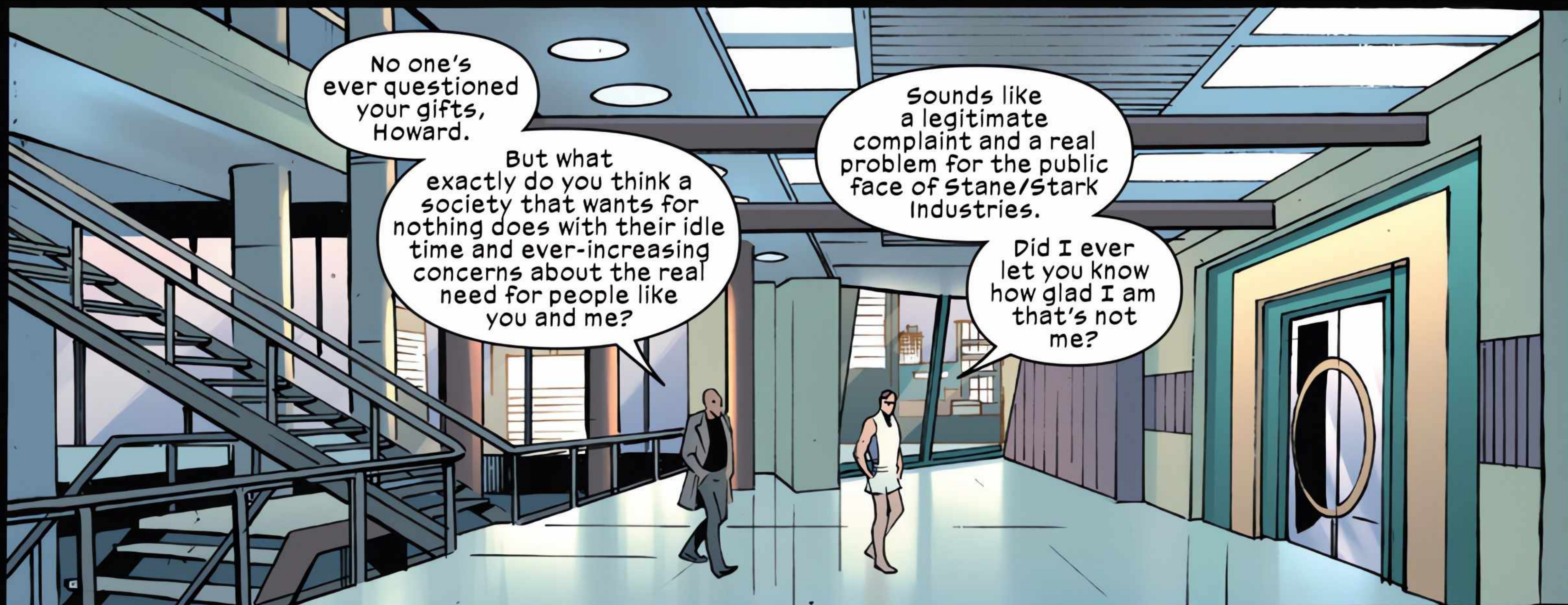
It's time, Howard.



No one begrudges your abilities, especially not me, but the two of us sit at the head of the umbrella corporation that literally runs this part of the world. There's a political aspect to this.

You need to get out of the lab. Show that billion-dollar face. Let the people love you. There's more important things out there than building miracle machines and life-altering inventions.

Tell that to all of the people who--*thanks to me*--no longer suffer from heart disease or die from twelve different kinds of cancers. I've never needed the applause, Obadiah. I'm happy settling for results.



No one's ever questioned your gifts, Howard.

But what exactly do you think a society that wants for nothing does with their idle time and ever-increasing concerns about the real need for people like you and me?

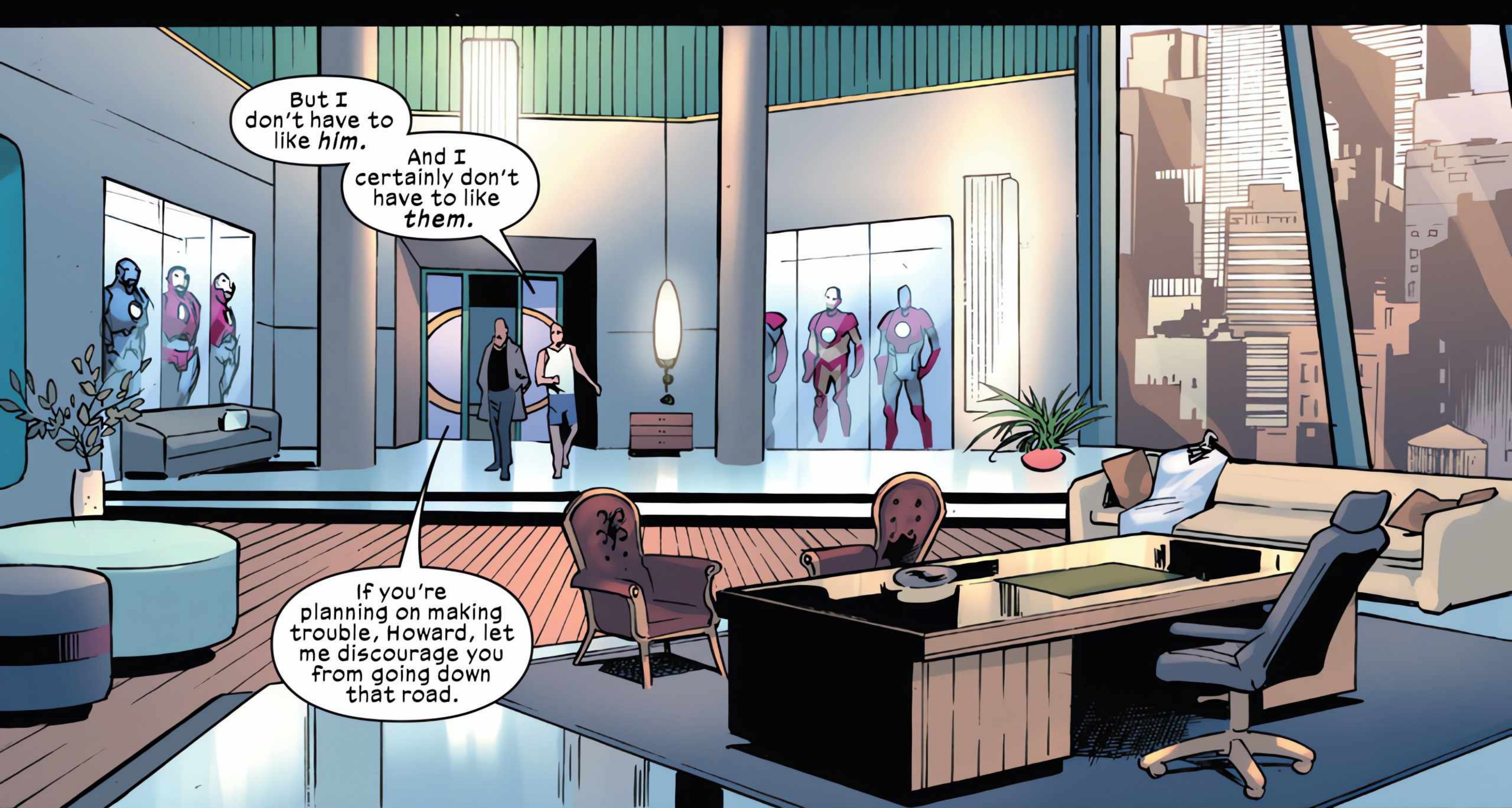
Sounds like a legitimate complaint and a real problem for the public face of Stane/Stark Industries.

Did I ever let you know how glad I am that's not me?



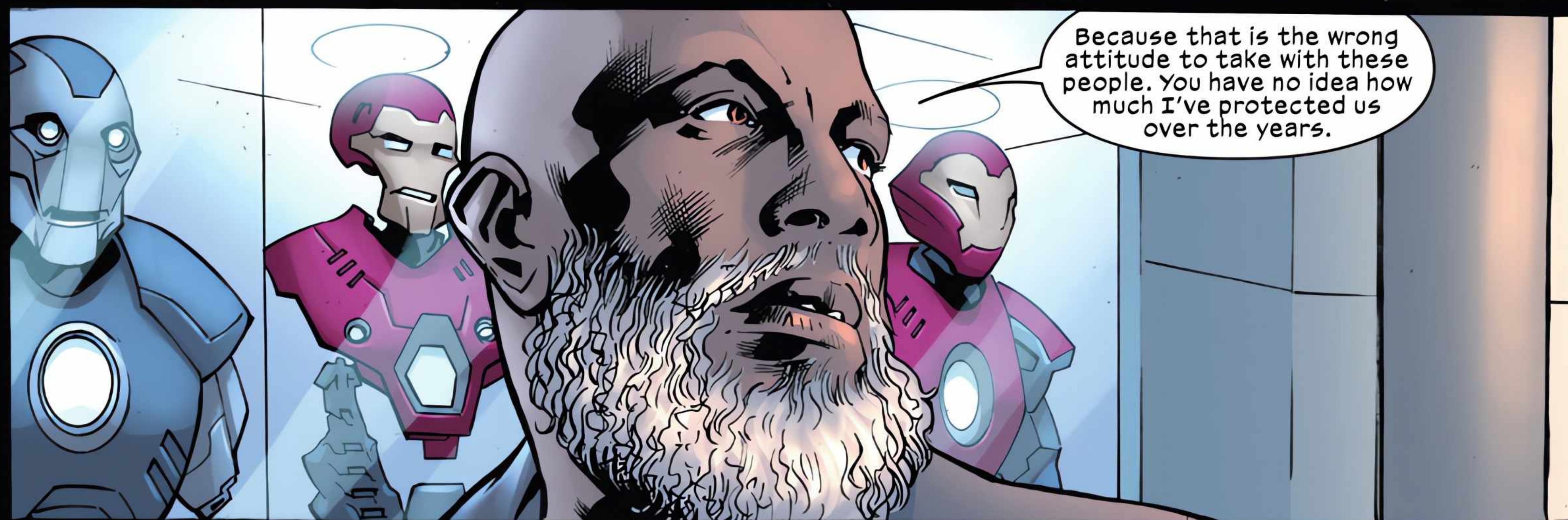
Howard.

Relax. I promised you I would go, especially since it wasn't really as much of an invitation as it was a request...



But I don't have to like *him*.
And I certainly don't have to like *them*.

If you're planning on making trouble, Howard, let me discourage you from going down that road.



Because that is the wrong attitude to take with these people. You have no idea how much I've protected us over the years.



Maybe not. But the system that they want to protect works, in large part, because we are part of that system.

To do violence to us would be to do violence to themselves.

My god...



Did you finally agree to go with me to the City because you have schemed up some radical restructuring of *what works* into *something "better"*?

Howard...do you have plans I don't know about?



In all seriousness?



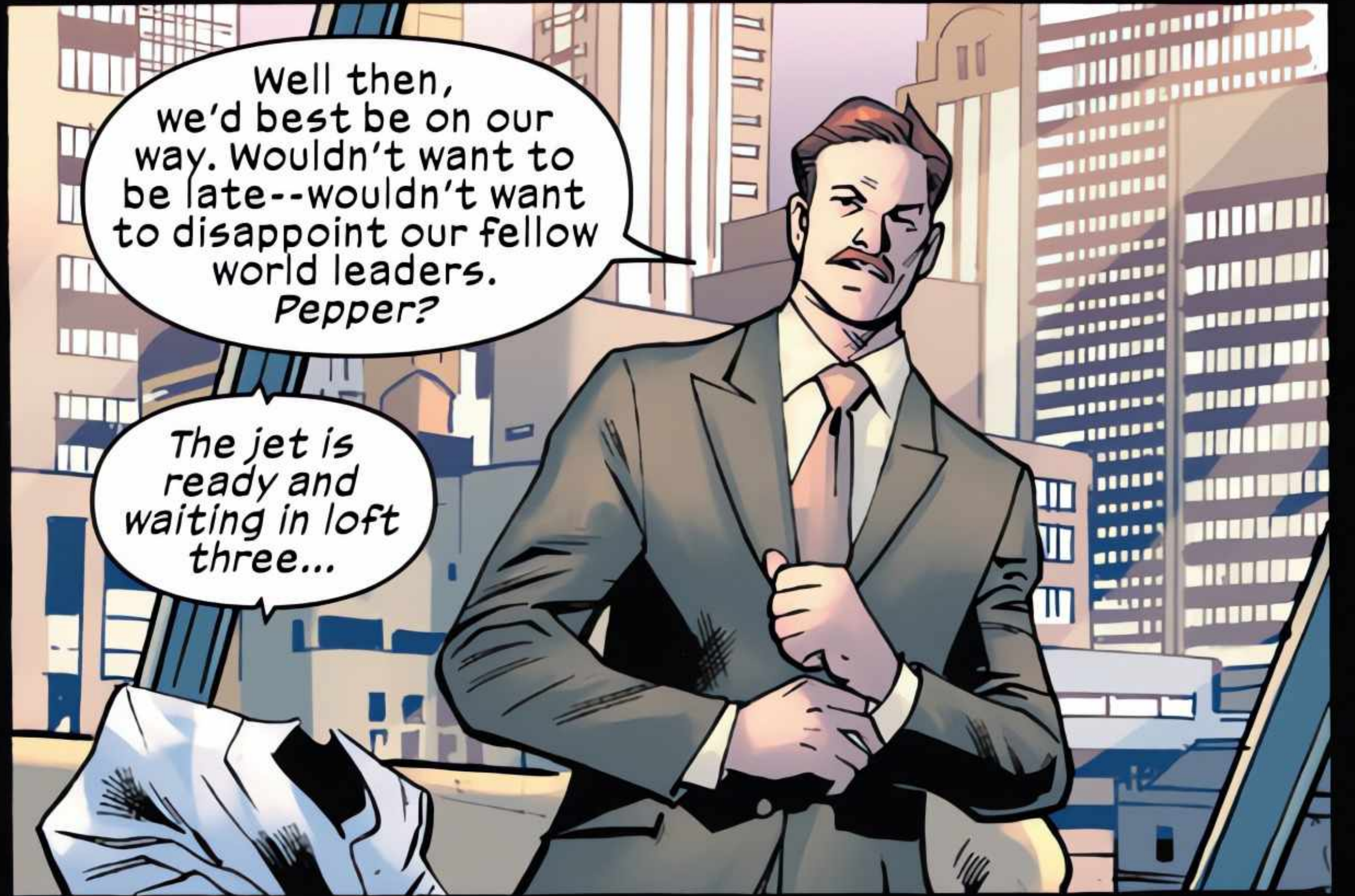
Maybe I look out the window and I question what we've done and what we've made. I think of all my gifts--all my abilities--and I wonder, is this it? Is the world-as-it-is the sum total of what I am capable of?

I tell you, old friend, I whisper these questions to myself at night and I can no longer accept the answers.

Does that make sense to you?

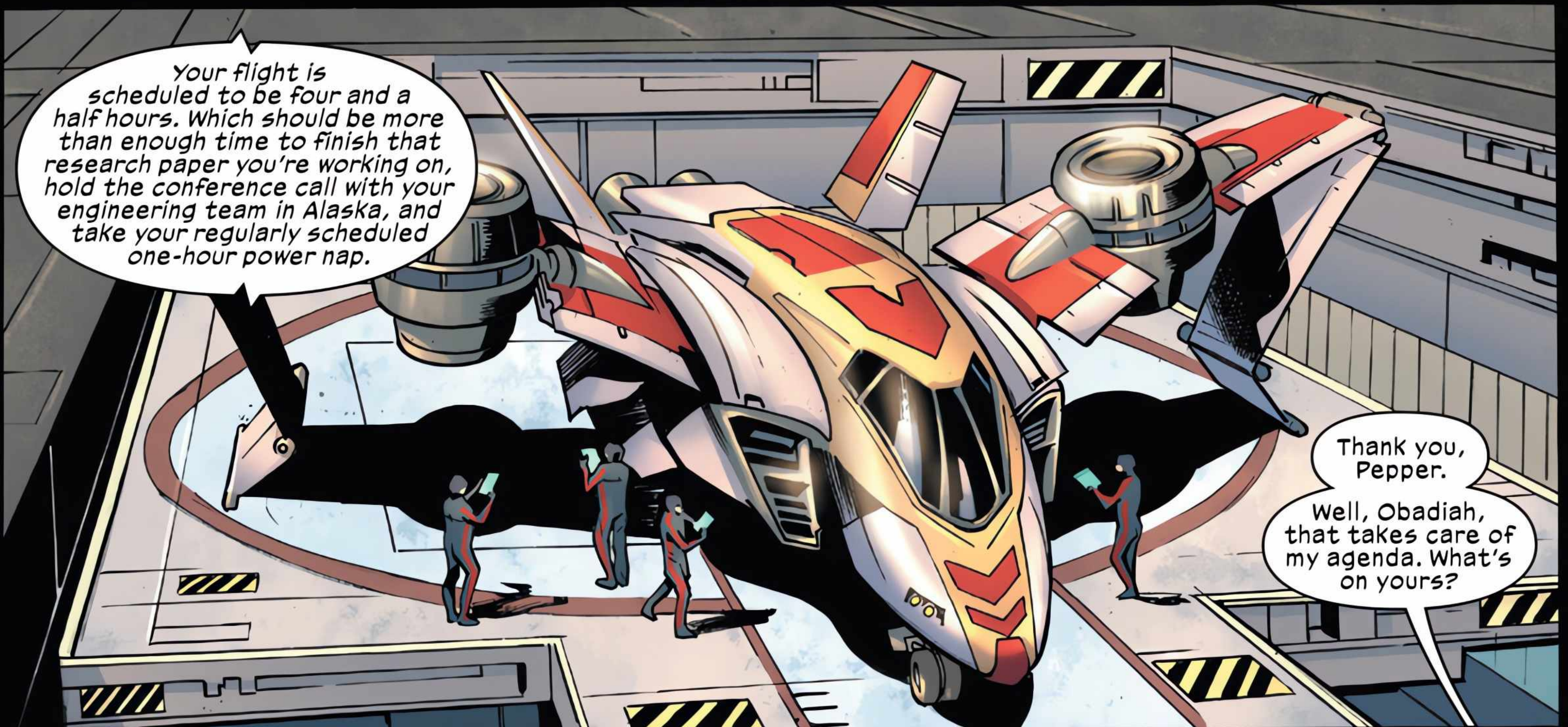


More than you can imagine.



Well then, we'd best be on our way. Wouldn't want to be late--wouldn't want to disappoint our fellow world leaders. Pepper?

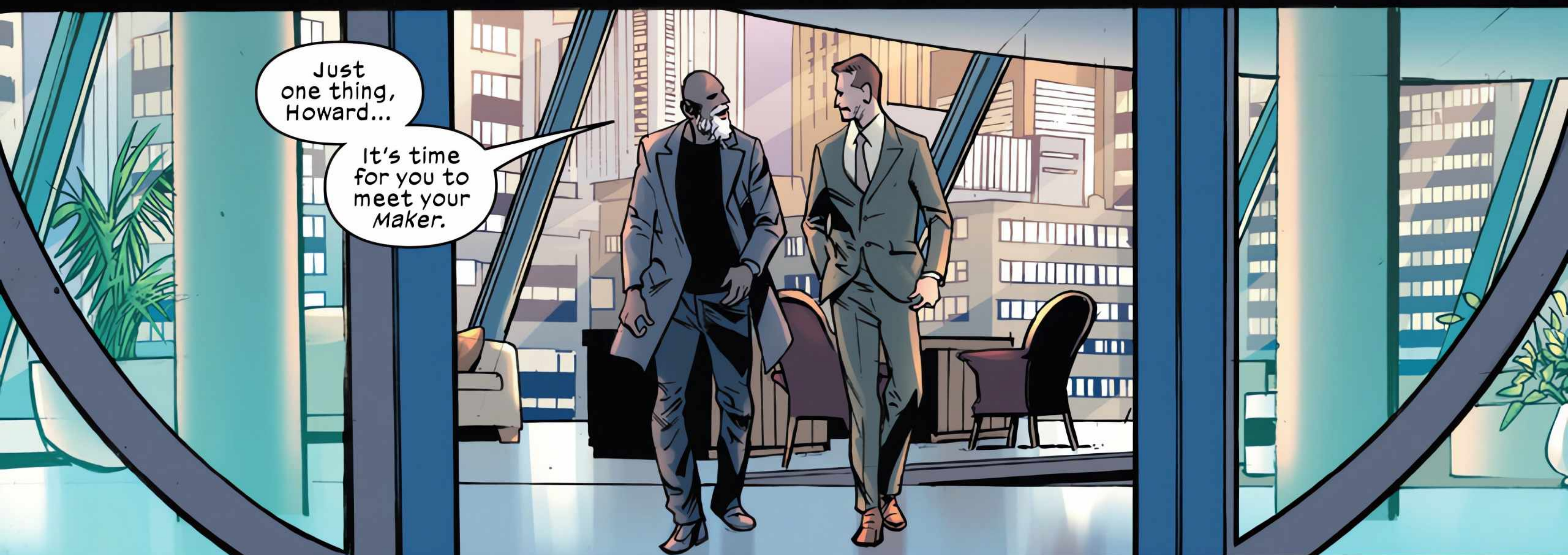
The jet is ready and waiting in loft three...



Your flight is scheduled to be four and a half hours. Which should be more than enough time to finish that research paper you're working on, hold the conference call with your engineering team in Alaska, and take your regularly scheduled one-hour power nap.

Thank you, Pepper.

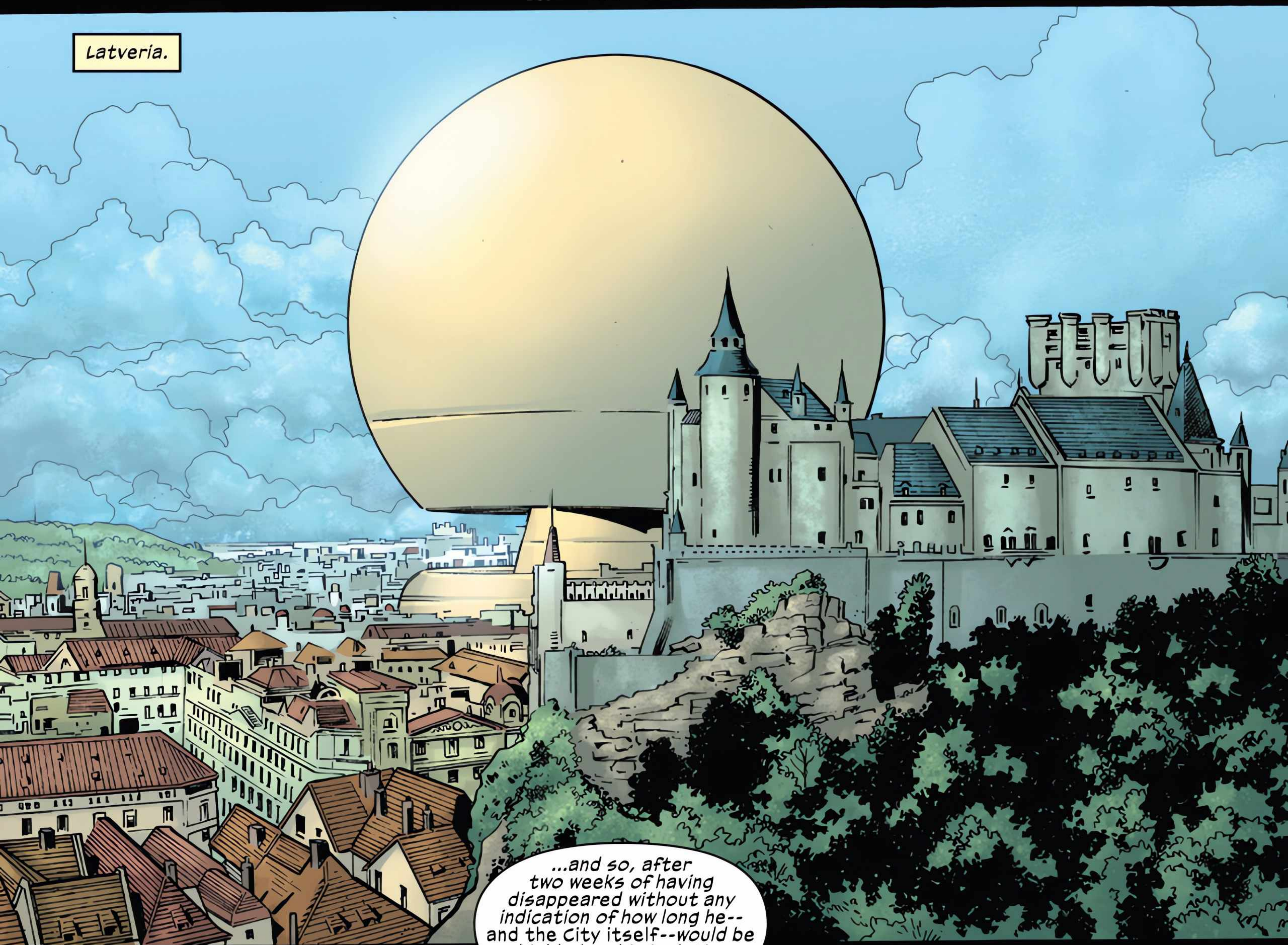
Well, Obadiah, that takes care of my agenda. What's on yours?



Just one thing, Howard...

It's time for you to meet your Maker.

Latveria.



...and so, after two weeks of having disappeared without any indication of how long he-- and the City itself--would be shielded and in isolation, word has reached us...

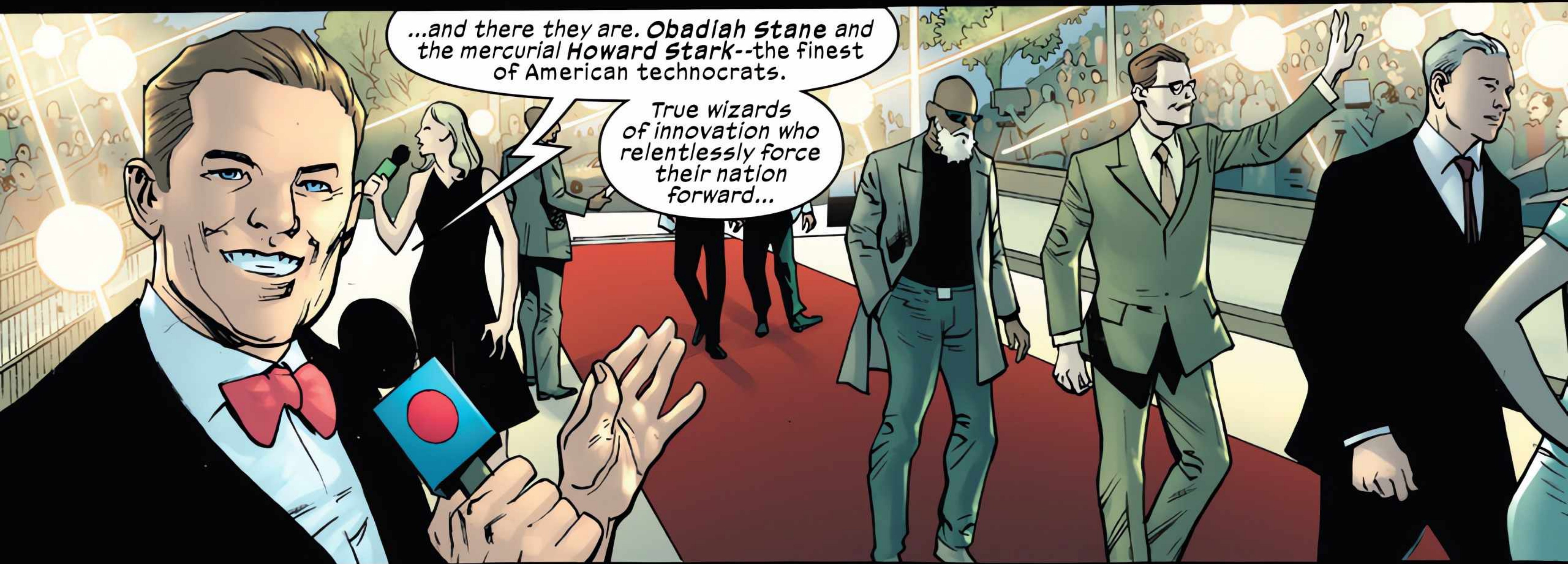


...that the doors of the City will be thrown open and the great convergence of incorporated nation-states will occur. To that end, attending the day's events is a who's who of this golden generation...



...and there they are. Obadiah Stane and the mercurial Howard Stark--the finest of American technocrats.

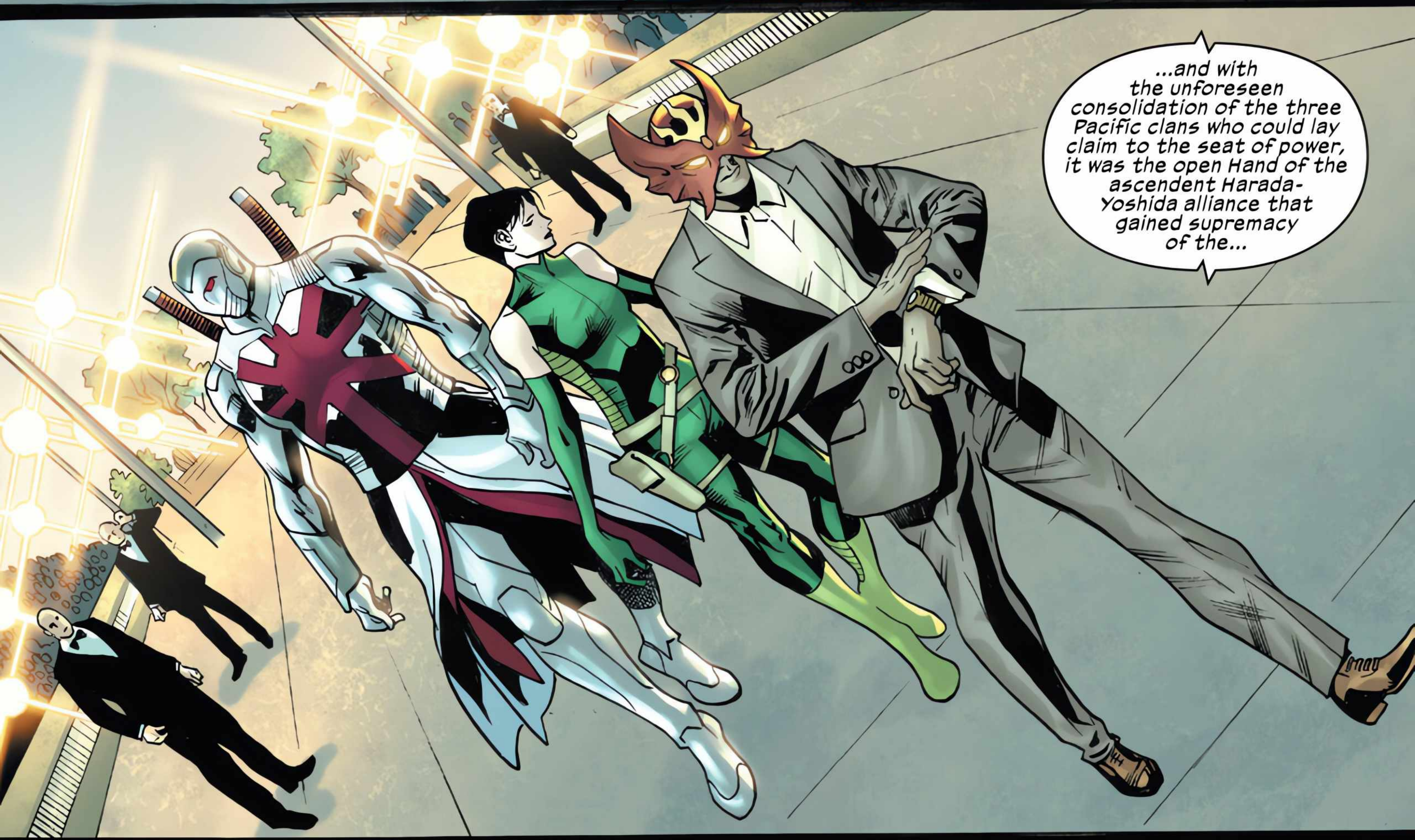
True wizards of innovation who relentlessly force their nation forward...



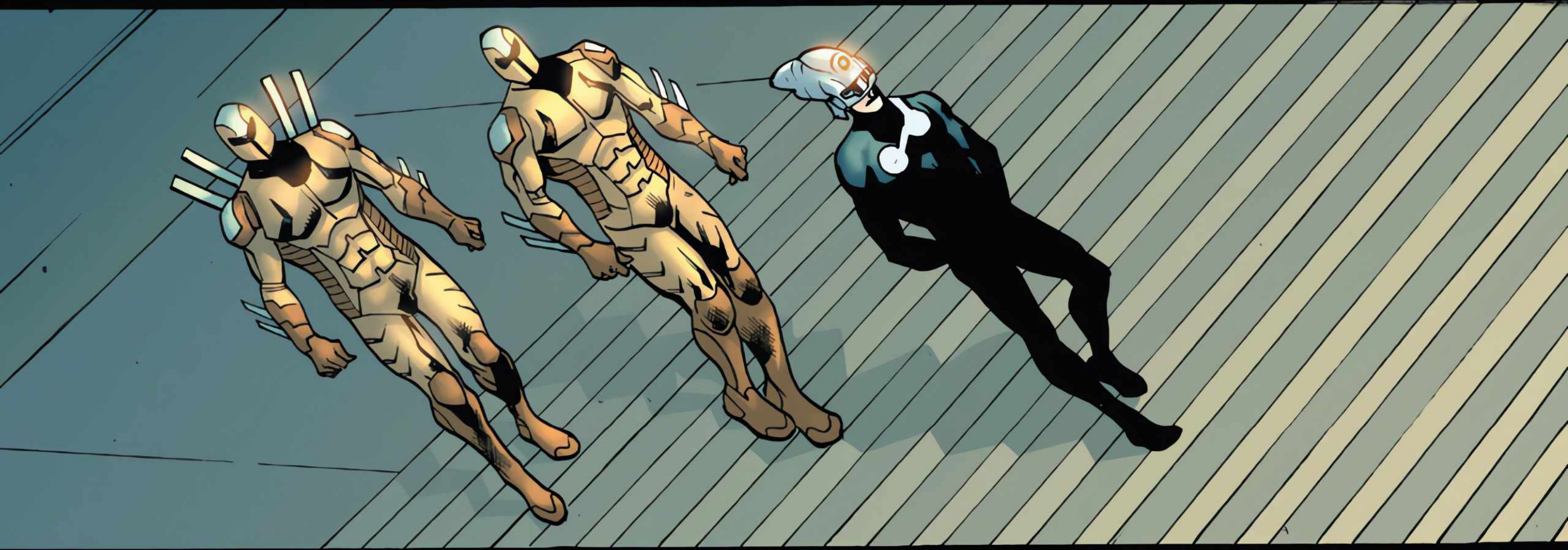
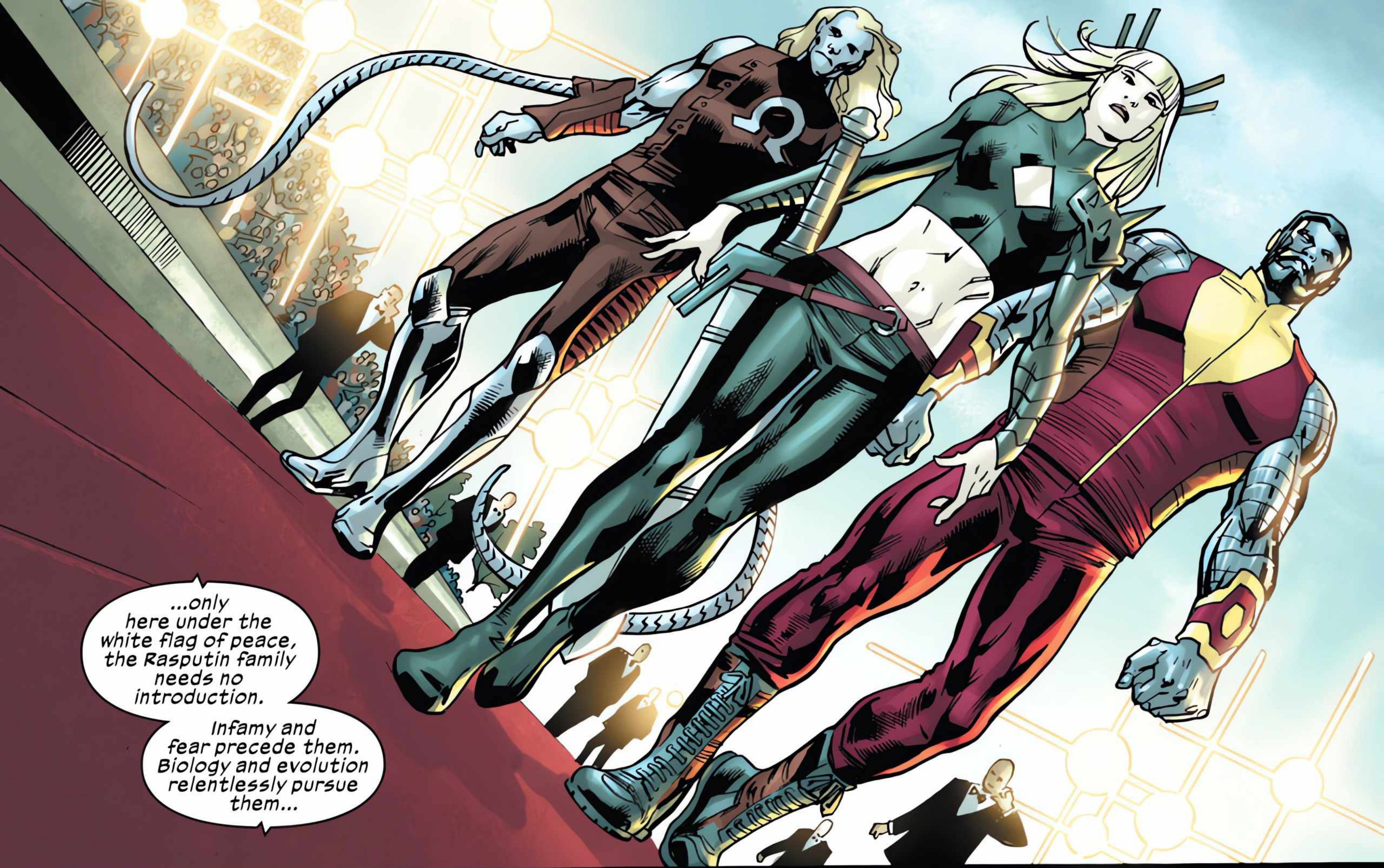


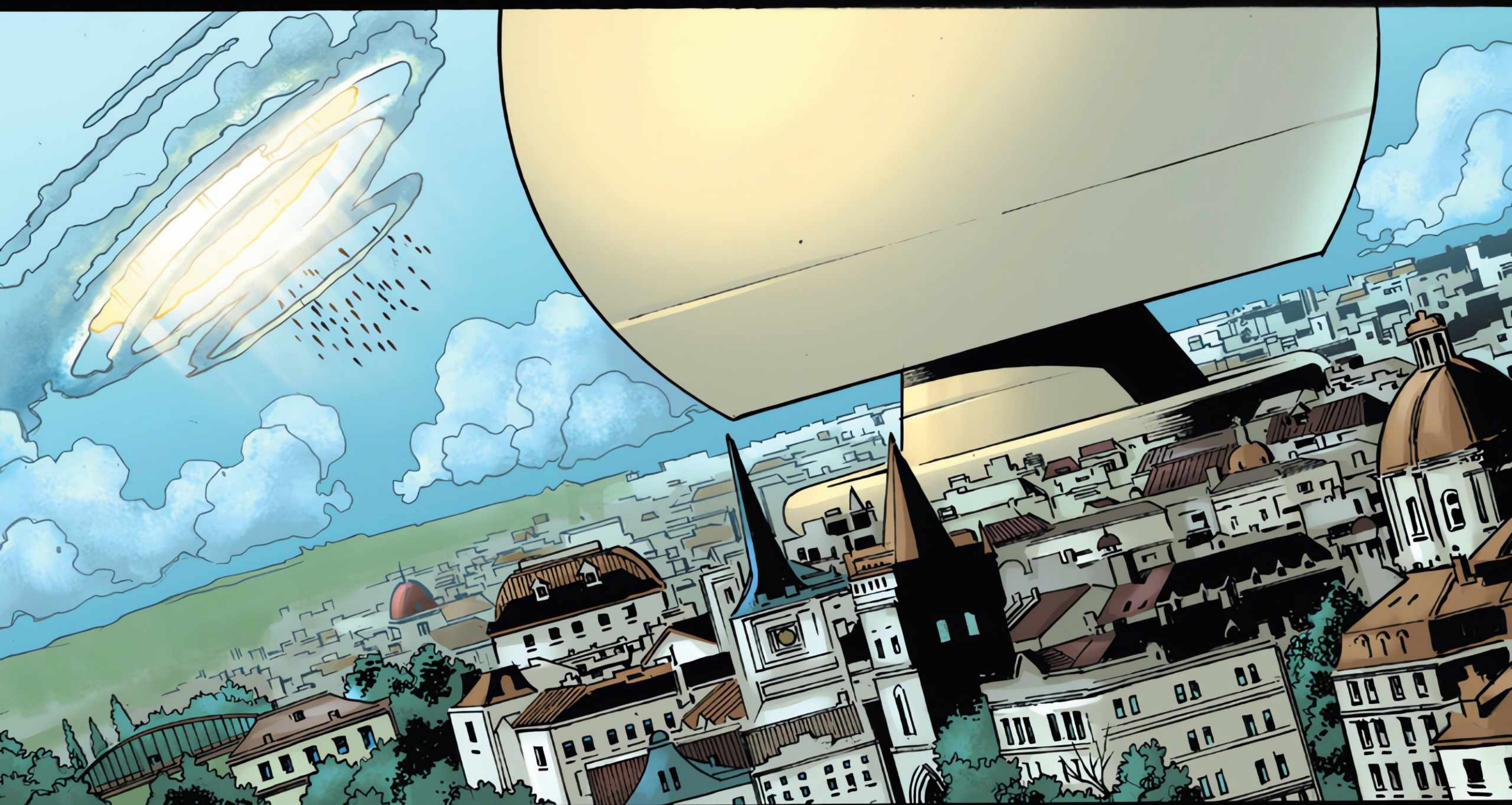
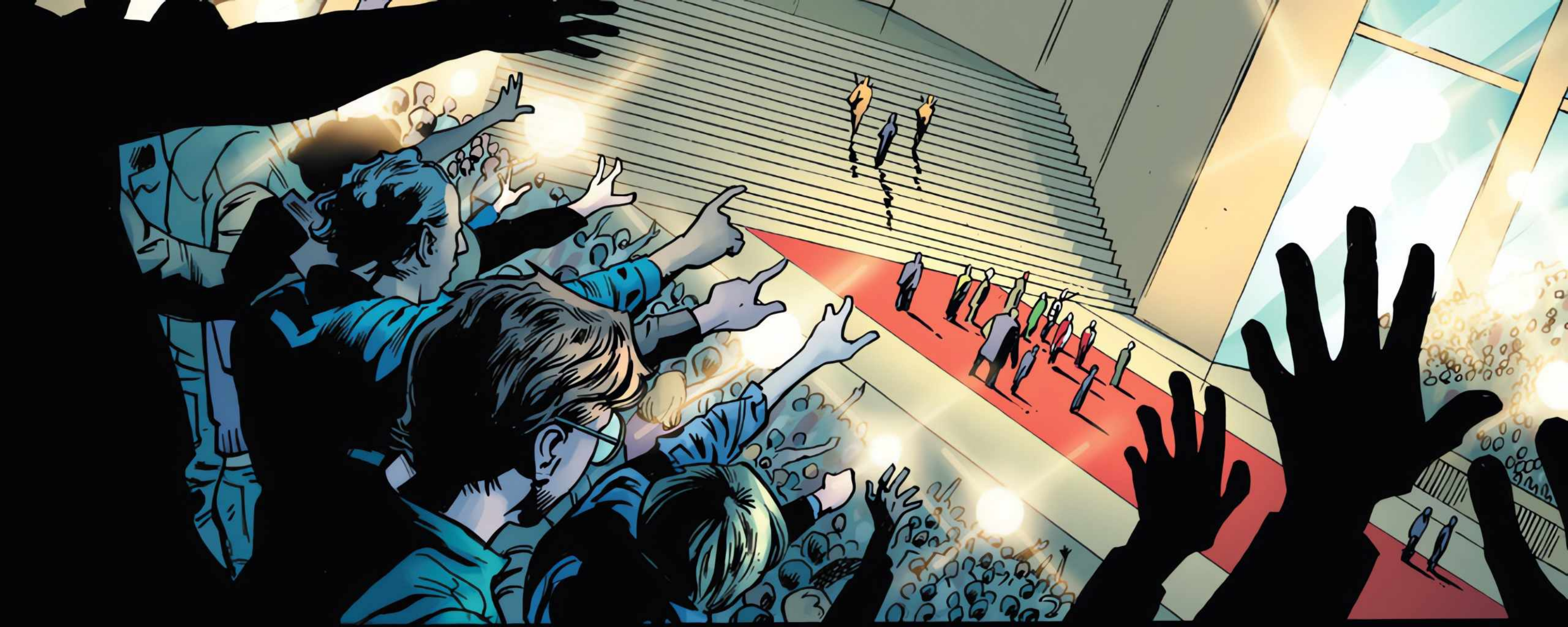
...it is said that the enlightened children of eternal light shine as brightly as they do because they rest in the shadow of the protective hand of their highest holy man, the legendary and immortal Hulk...

...a testament to the power of serenity and the epitome of those who resist the seductive call of rage and revenge...

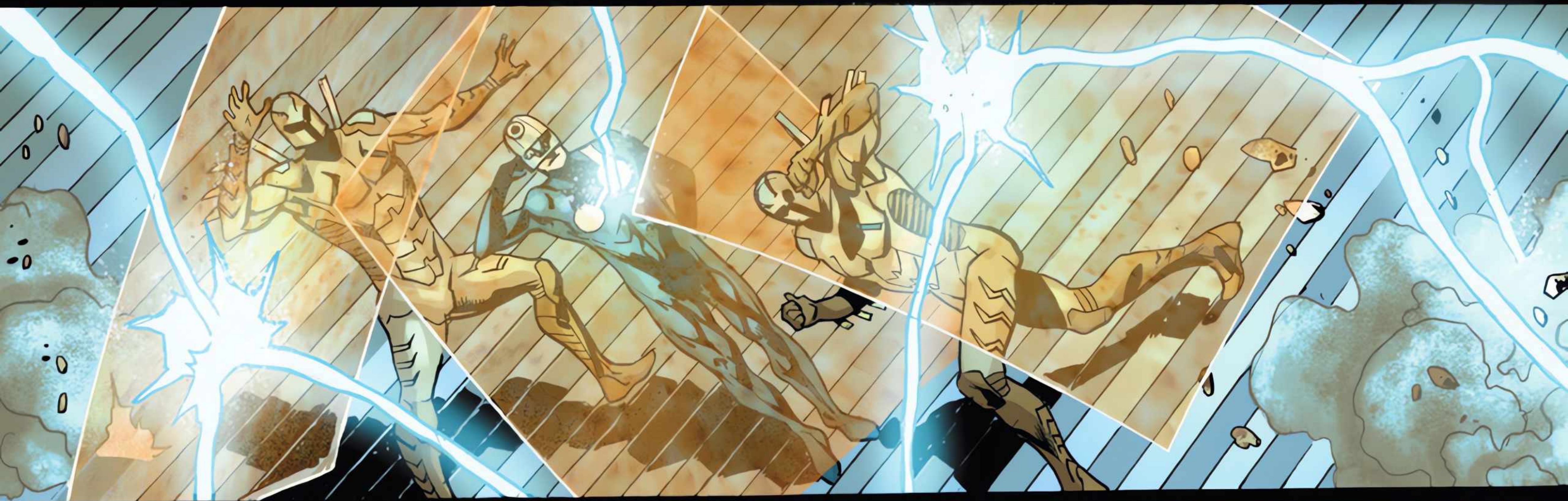


...and with the unforeseen consolidation of the three Pacific clans who could lay claim to the seat of power, it was the open Hand of the ascendent Harada-Yoshida alliance that gained supremacy of the...









Obadiah!
What the hell is--?

No idea. You don't happen to be wearing your portable suit, do you?

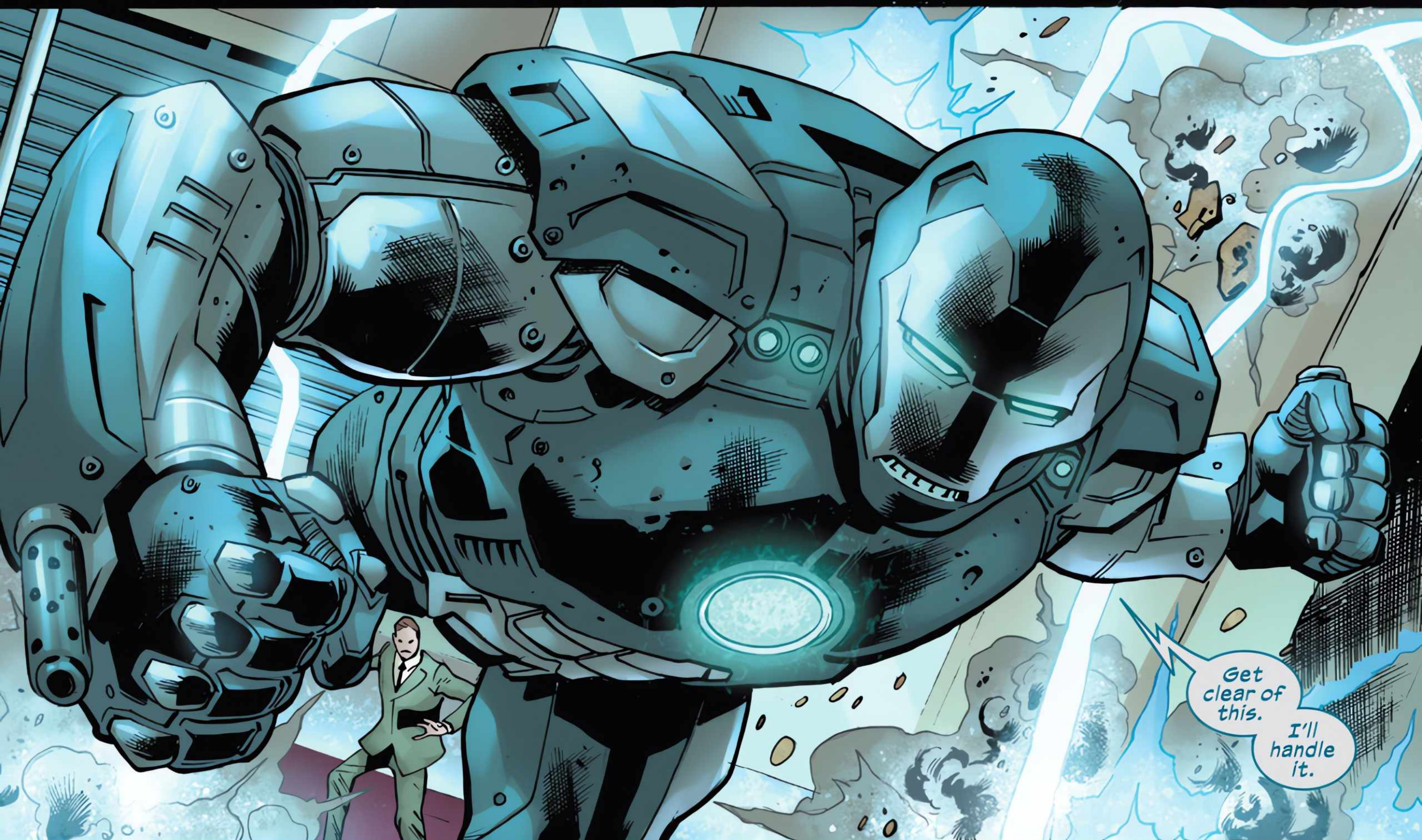
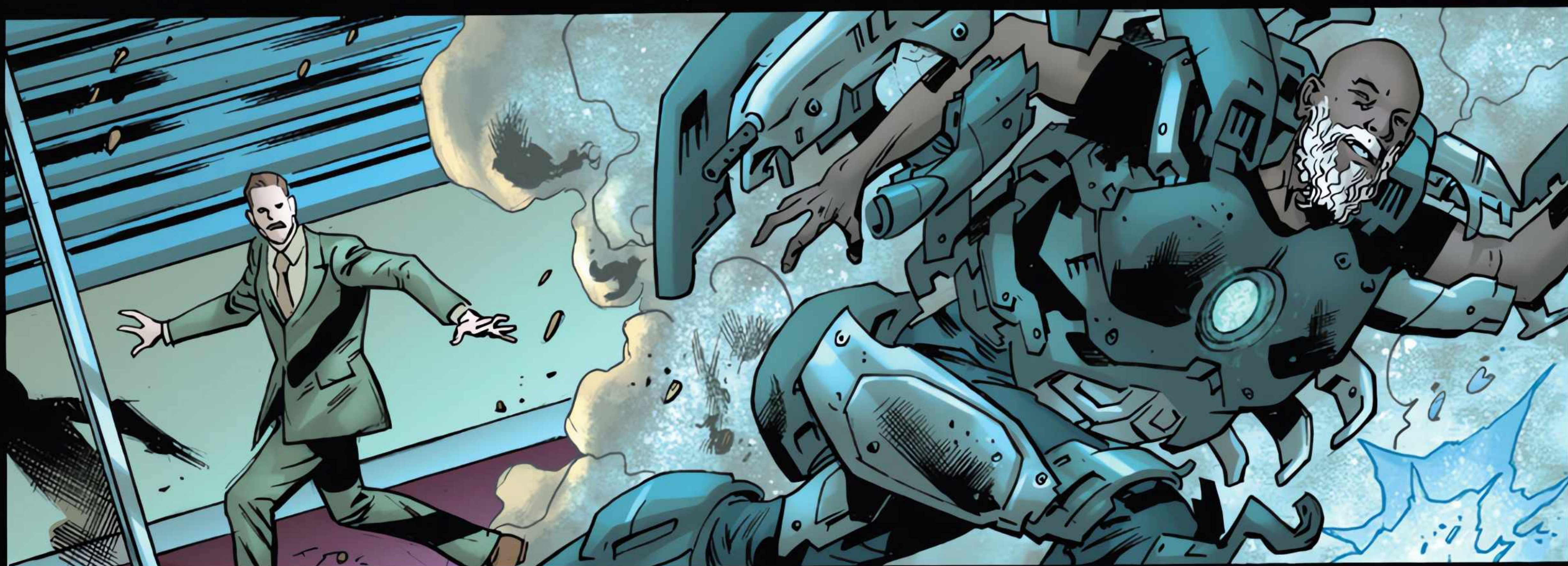
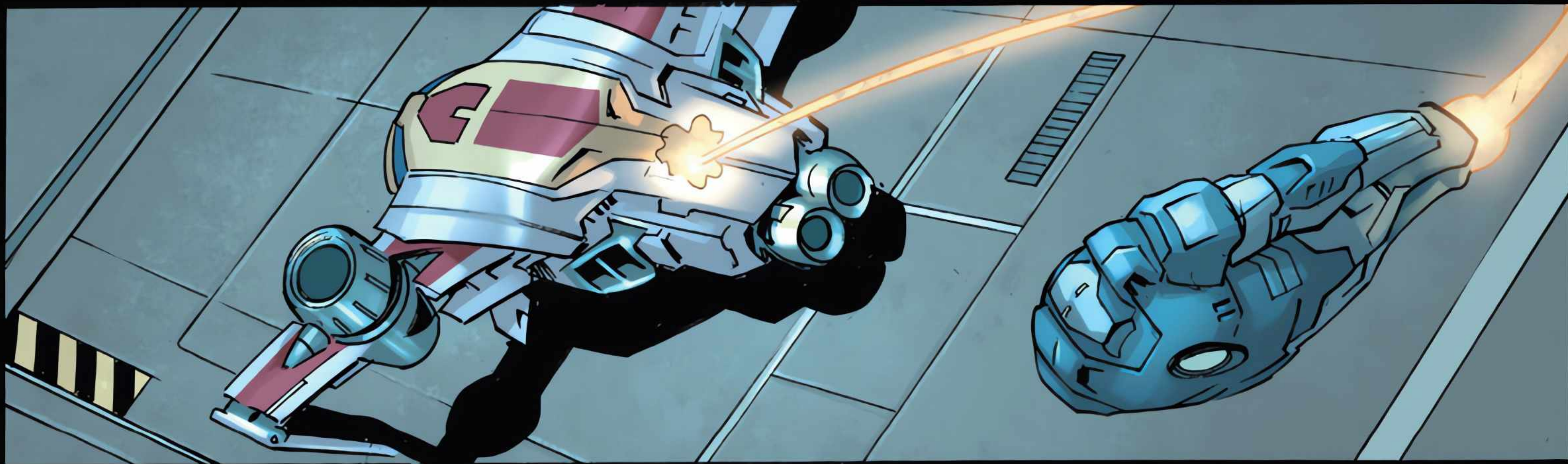


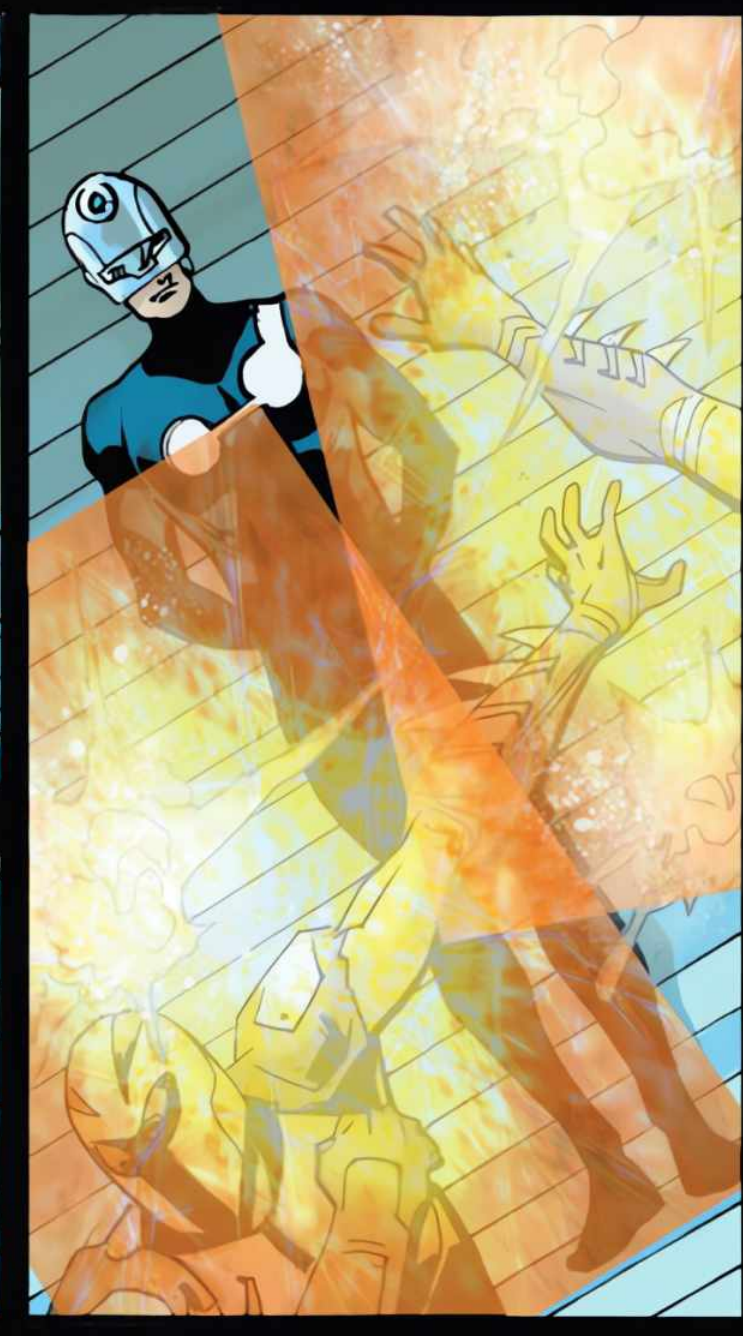
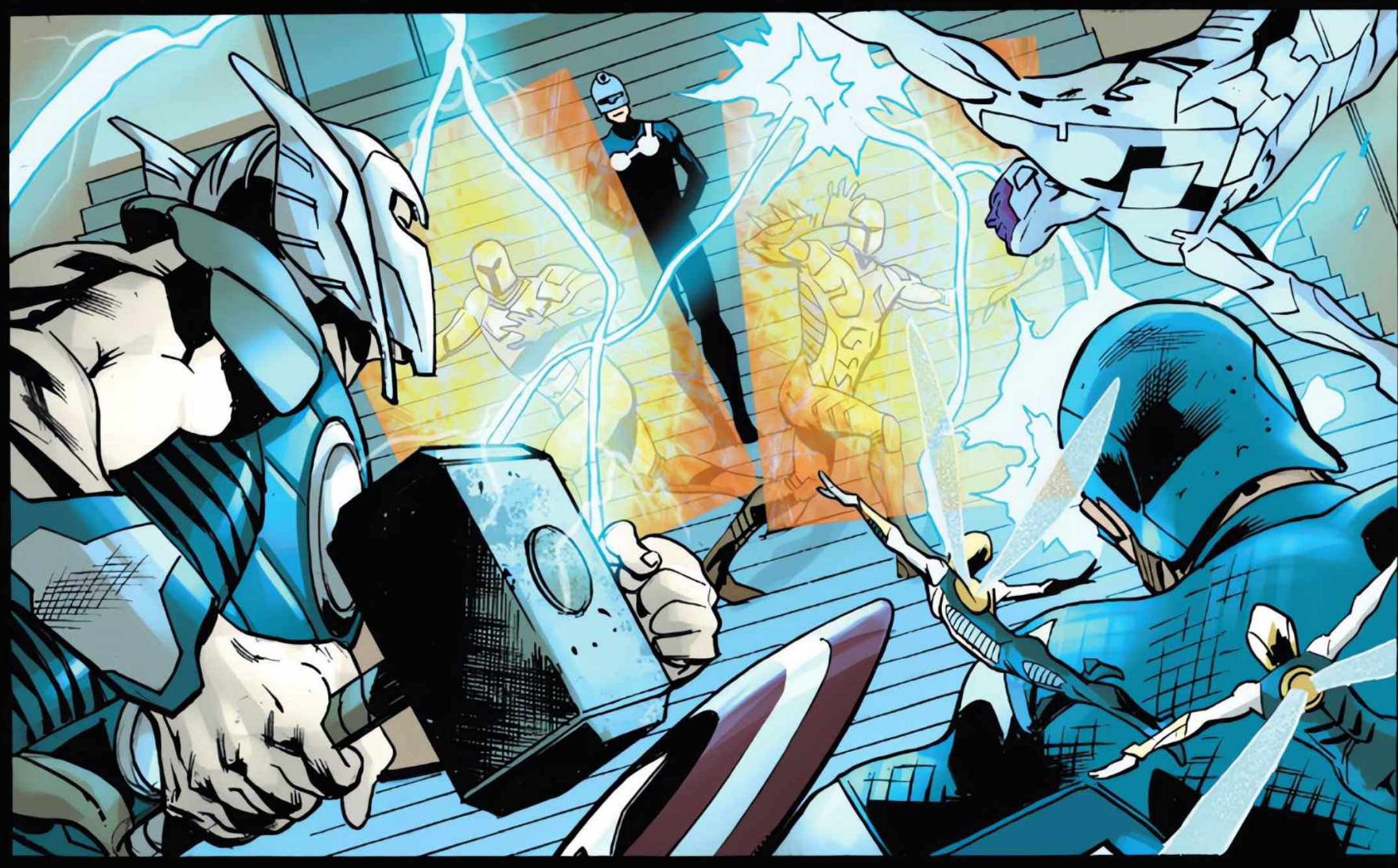
You told me not to come armed.

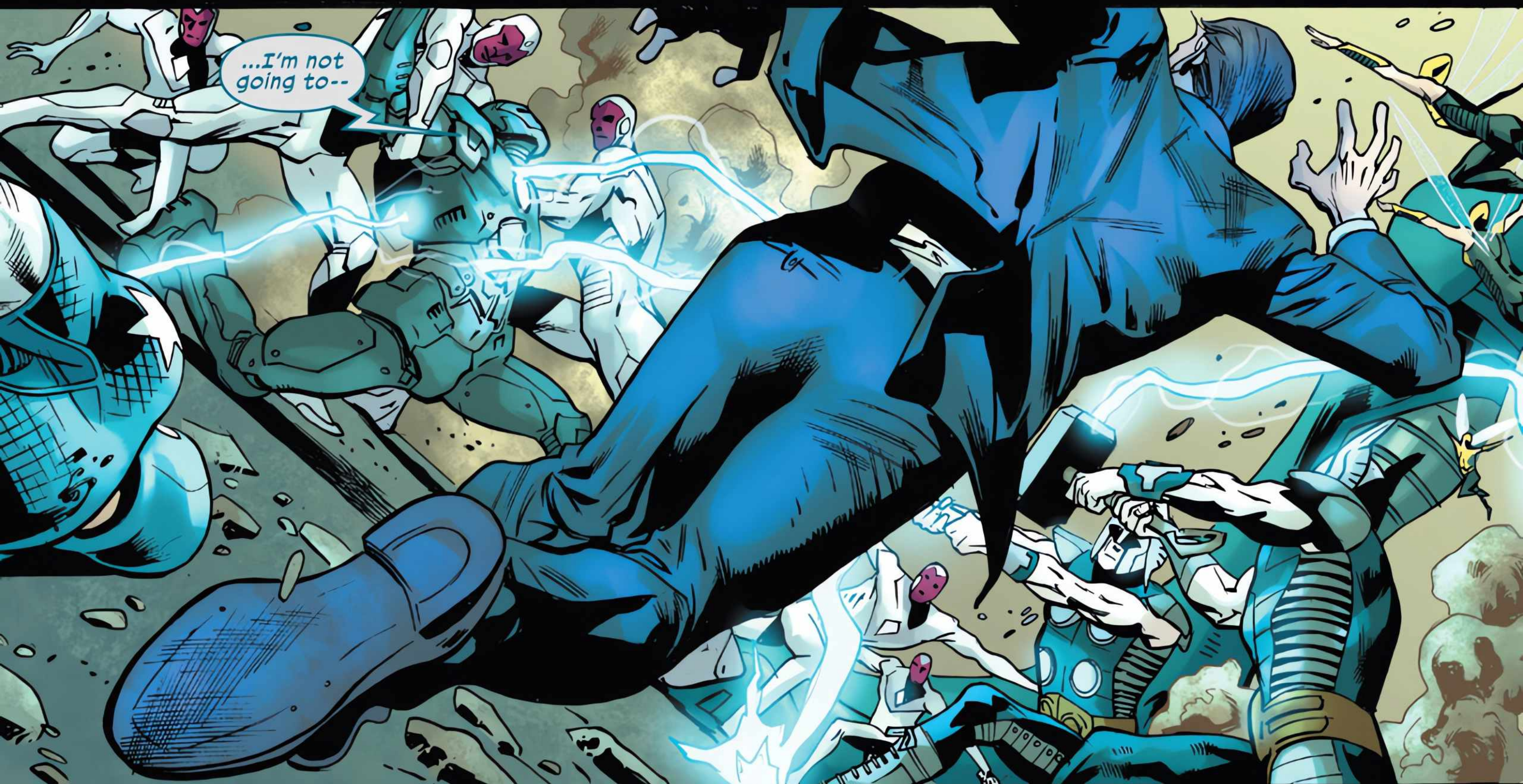
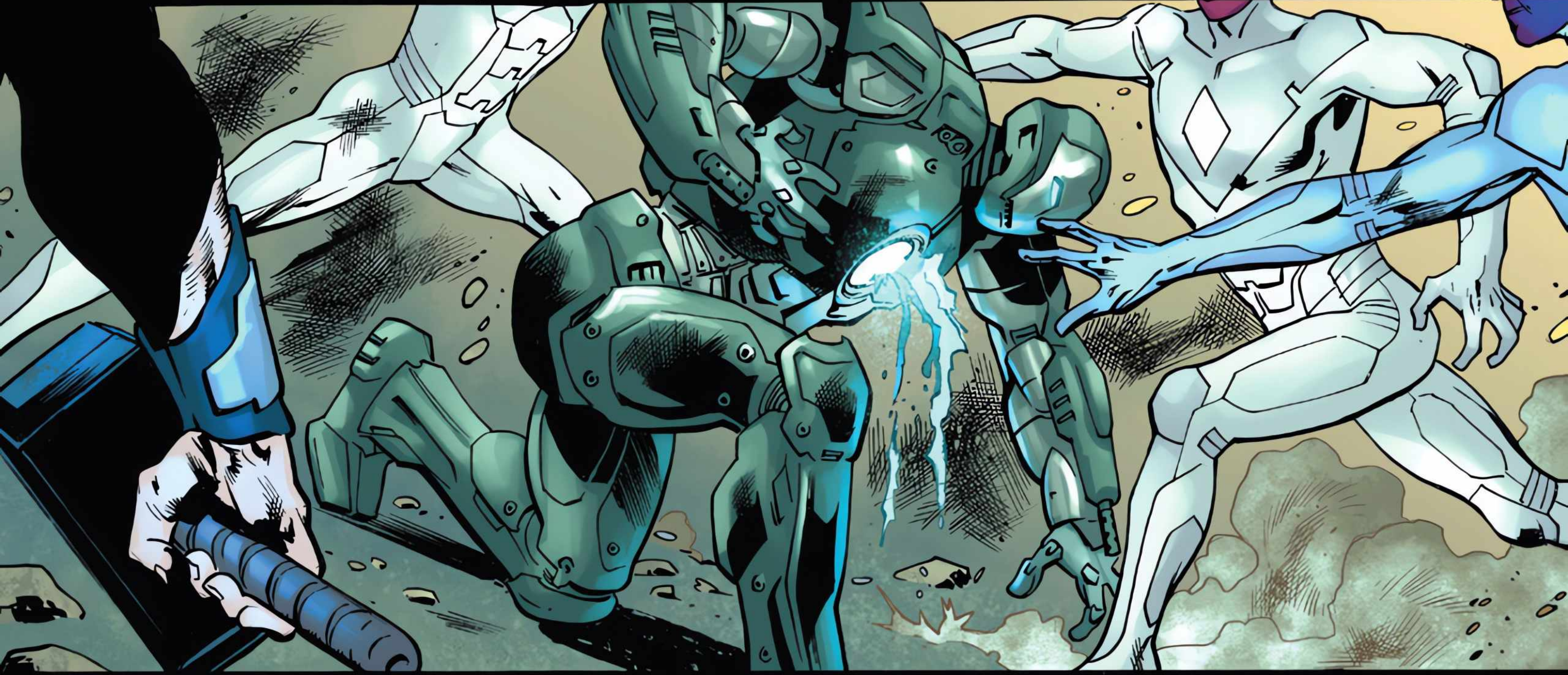


And when, exactly, did you start listening to me?

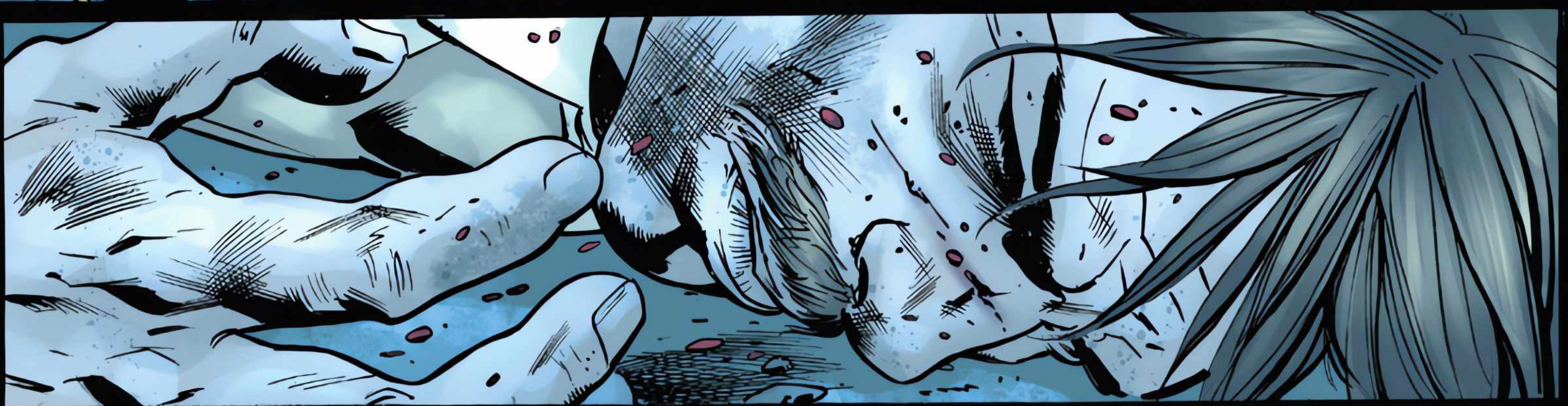
Fair point. I won't ever make that mistake again.











Howard...

Howard,
you can *wake
up* now.

Can
you *hear
me*?

Wha--?
What's
happened?

Terrible
news, I'm
afraid.

Obadiah
Stane is
dead.

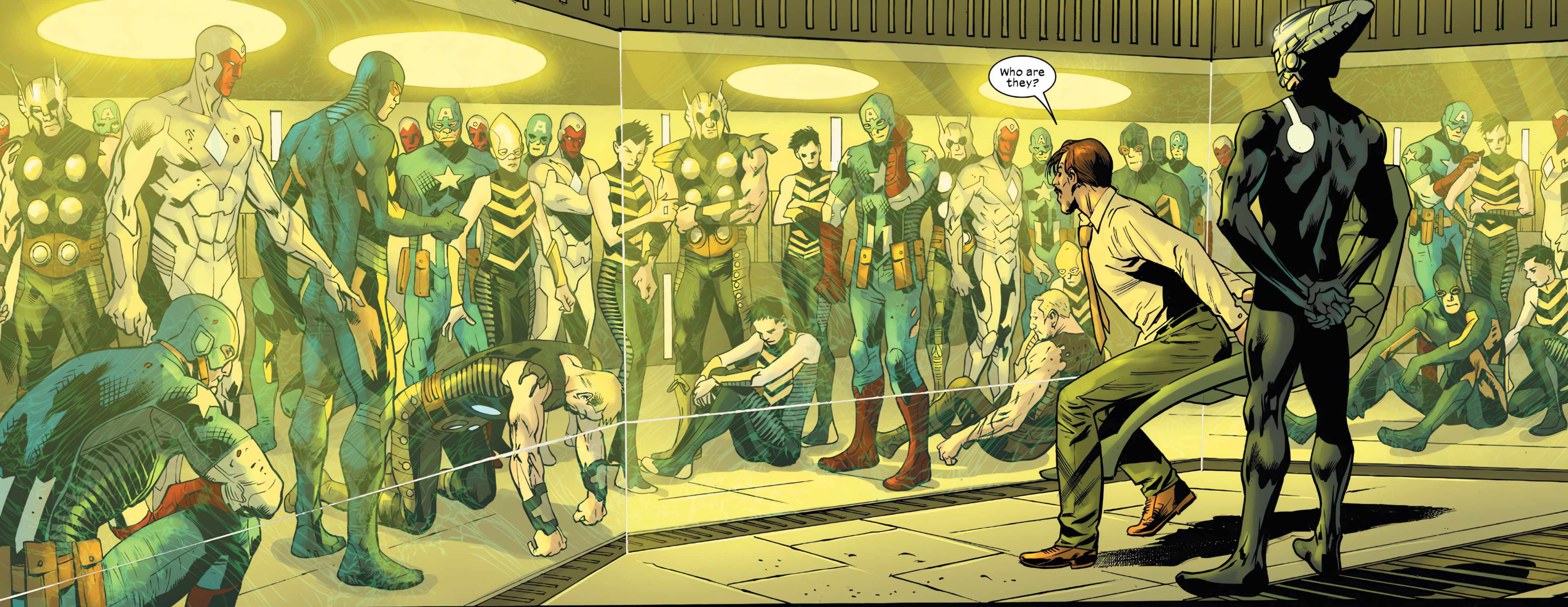
...
I...
I saw it
happen.

I wish there
was time to
grieve...

...but *time* is something
we have very *little* of
at the moment.

Take a
look.

What
the...?



They are from *the future*. Temporal suicide bombers here to erase me--and possibly you--from history.

Why?



That's the question, isn't it?

Does it make you fear what terrible things you're going to do in your future? Or does it anger you that they tried to rob you of the chance to have one?



Honestly, I'm not sure I've ever bought into the idea of static temporal states.



No? No *cause* and *effect* looping around to eat each other? No *snakes*? No *tails*?

Want to find out?

How are you going to--?



Why are we here?

Have we done something wrong?

Is there some reaso--?



Shhhh.

In the City, we've gotten rather good at genetic engineering: cellular legacies, protein archaeology and the recognizing of historical genetic markers.

We did a regressive scan of each of the future soldiers and discovered that almost all of them are identical designer clones--engineered recombinants--of seed DNA.

Then we tracked it to the source.

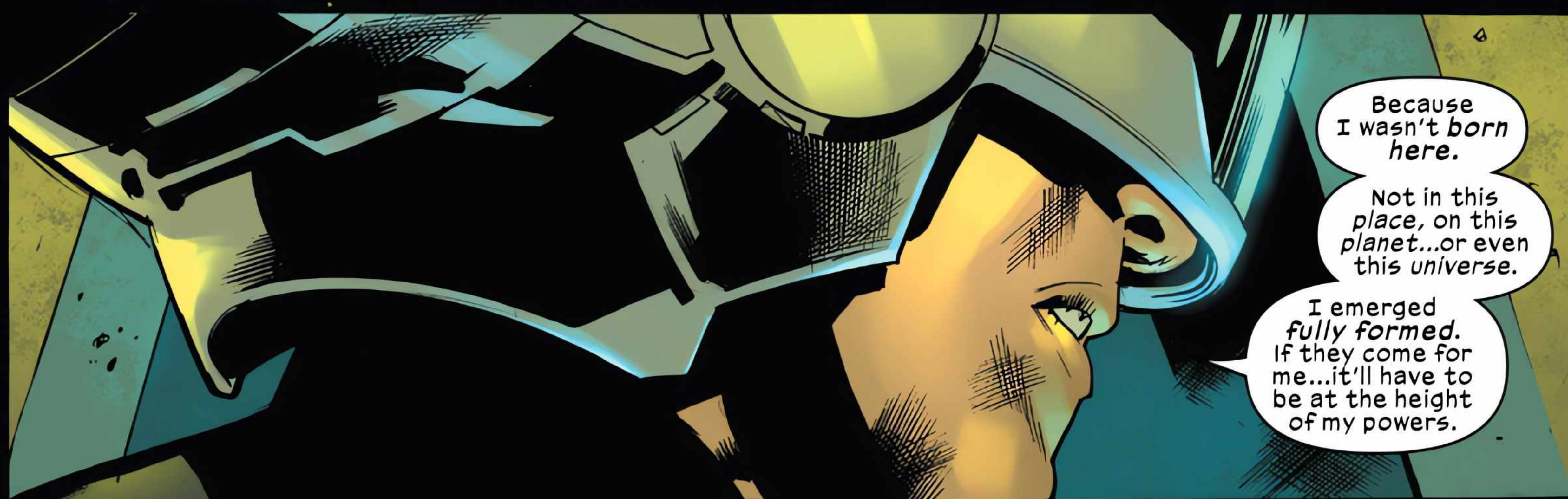
You can't possibly be going to--

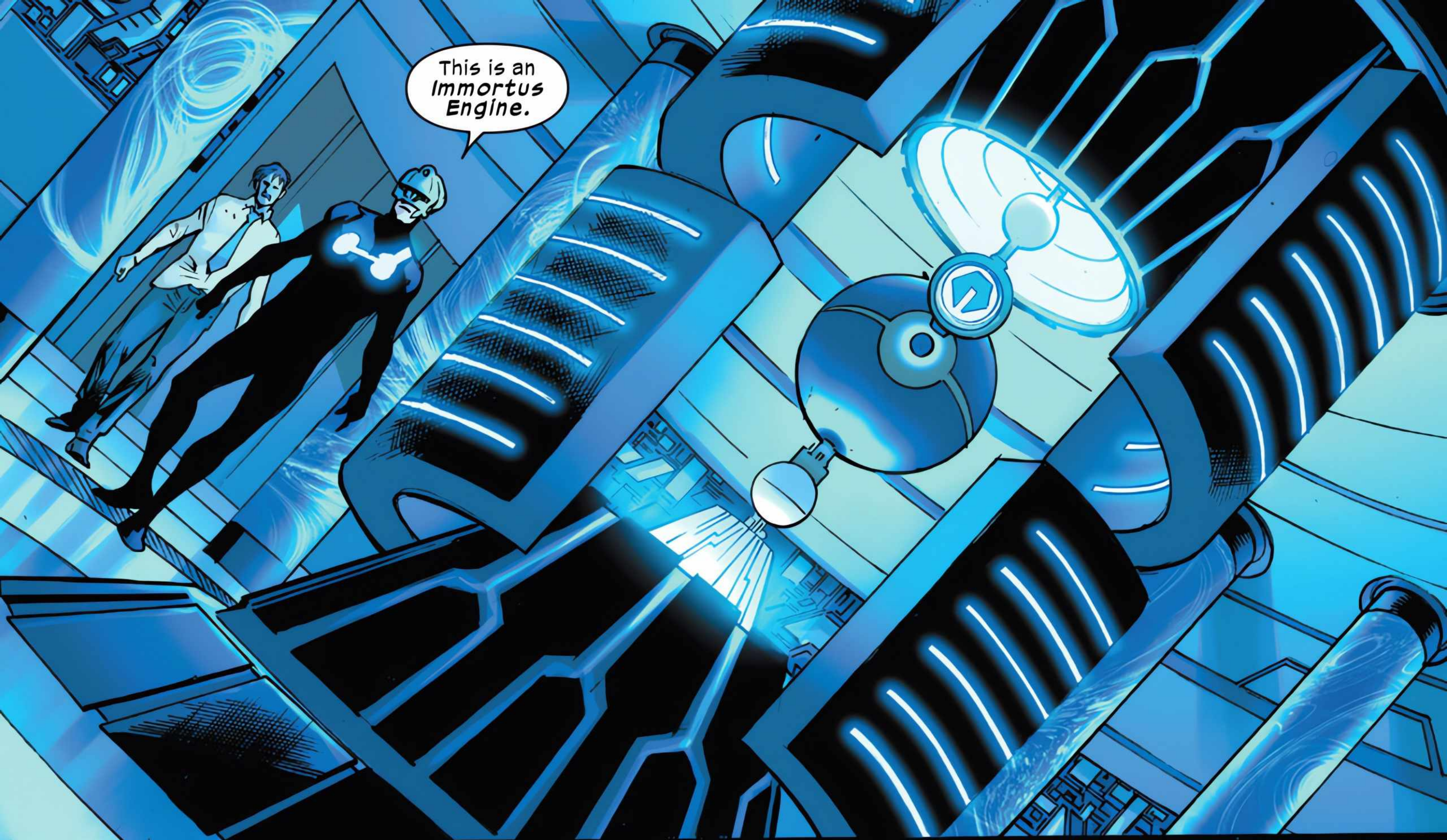


How could you?

How c--?

Appl---





This is an
Immortus
Engine.



Variable power
source. The
transfer coils are
unstable
molecules.

I can't
see why someone
would choose to
build it that way,
unless...
oh...

You
made a *time*
machine.



This is why...this has
to be why they came
here...

It is *damaged*.
Currently *non-*
functional,
but--

You have
to *destroy*
it.

Forward
and backward,
bending wills to
my design.

I wouldn't
even if I
could.



Look around.
Do you think this
perfectly ordered
society you live in
is how things were
supposed
to go?

It
wasn't.
I promise
you.



"I used this machine to remake the world into what it is now."

"Erase threats before they could emerge..."



...and repurpose existing pieces--like you--for grander designs.



It's...it's unconscionable--unbelievable. You have to understand the full scope of what you've done, right?

You annihilated the future--you destroyed their past--this won't be the end of it...

This was just your first encounter.



No. It was the second.



The first was two weeks ago...



Our meeting left quite an... *Impression.*



...
How are you not dead?

My body is not like yours. For self-preservation's sake, I chose to separate and redistribute my brain and vital organs long ago.

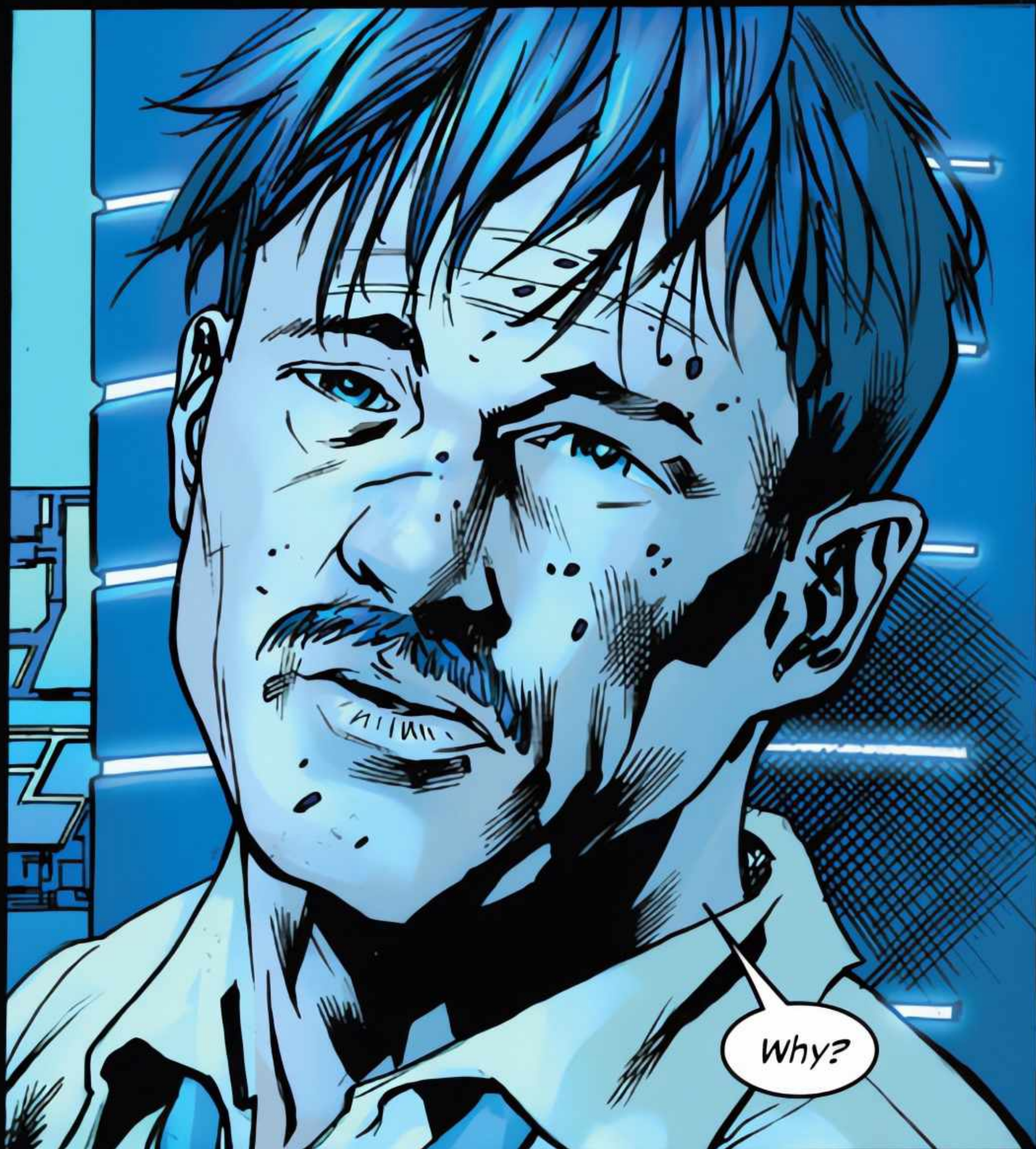
I will heal and it will take time, but I did suffer some damage.



My memory is...*impaired.* *Flawed* and *fractured...*

I can't trust what I remember because I am remembering things... *incorrectly.*

What I do know is that I need you. More than anyone else on *this world* and *maybe others.*



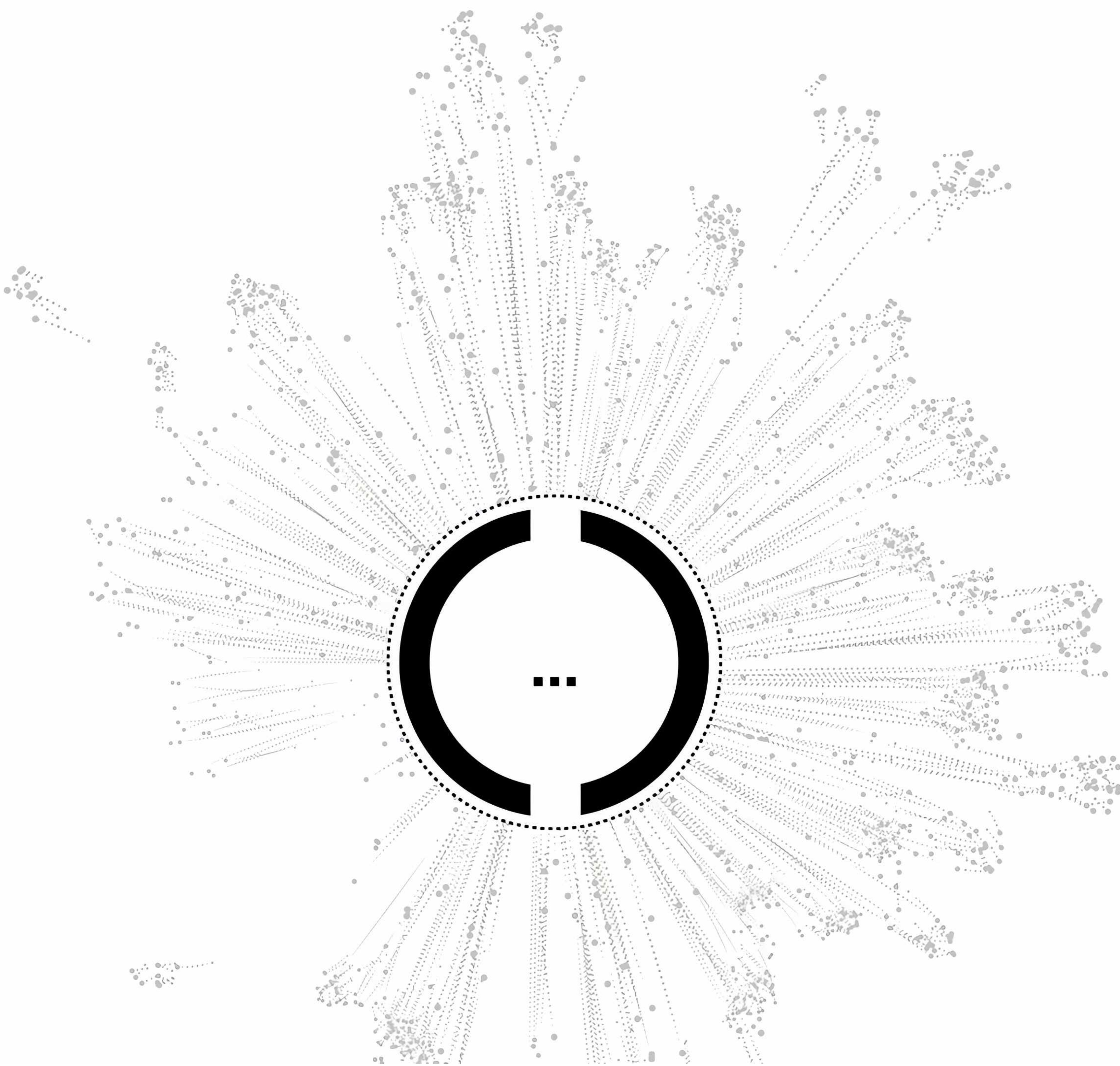
Why?



Because,
Howard
Stark...

...I believe
you are the
one who *built*
this.

TO BE CONTINUED...





**NEXT
ISSUE**